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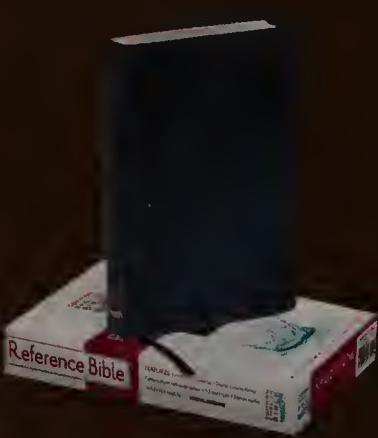
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by John M. Buchanan

A this-worldly story

WHEN OUR CHILDREN were young, we tried to shield them from the excesses of the cultural, materialistic and market-driven year-end holiday. We wanted them to understand that for us Christmas was about the birth of Jesus and God's love; it had nothing to do with Rudolph, Frosty and a Santa Claus who brings gifts and toys in direct correlation to a child's compliant behavior. We failed miserably. In *Christmas: Festival of Incarnation*, Donald Heinz notes that Christians have always lamented and resisted the cultural captivity of Christmas. From the beginning they've tried to separate themselves from year-end festivities. But, says Heinz, it's been a "spectacular failure of theological imagination."

Even before the Romans, the winter solstice was an occasion of thanksgiving and celebration. The darkness and cold of the retreating sun inspired terror, and when the sun finally started its slow return, ancient peoples marked the event with feasting and fertility celebrations. Some of their symbols are still with us: boughs of evergreen, holly and ivy, wreaths.

Later the Romans marked year's end with Saturnalia, a raucous weeklong party. Christians decided to offer an alternative and began to celebrate the incarnation with Christ's Mass. Their hope was that in time Christ's Mass would replace Saturnalia. That effort failed, Heinz says, as has every church's attempt to banish the secular festival.

Nobody was as hard on Christmas as the Puritans, notes Heinz. "They argued that December 25 was not biblical but heathen, that Jesus would have disapproved of his birthday celebrations, and that Christmas was just an excuse for . . . gross behavior, social upheaval, and drunkenness, no doubt aided by the lull in agricultural life." The Puritans ordered shops to stay open, insisted that work go on as usual and banned holiday cakes and candles. They also managed to have Christmas declared illegal by the Massachusetts legislature from 1659 to 1681. Heinz reports that the U.S. Congress even remained in session on Christmas Day from 1789 to 1851.

The Puritans did a lot of good things, but banning Christmas because of eating, drinking and celebrating, not to mention pagan customs like kissing under the mistletoe, was not one of their more admirable ideas.

After all, incarnation means that this world is God's creation and that God loved it so much that God came here to be with us. The story could not be more this-worldly: pregnant, unwed teenager, perplexed fiancé, arduous journey, inn full of raucous guests, barn full of animals, labor, pain, blood, birth and shepherds.

It could not be more human or more earthy, and that is the point. Incarnation means that God is with us in this world, the sacred in the secular, the holy in the profane. It is this world that God entered on that first Christmas and enters again and again.

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LETTERS

Faking it

Stephanie Paulsell's "Faking it" (Nov. 15) raises an important issue. There is way too much certainty in ministry today. Perhaps there always has been. I am a former minister, now out of the church, but still a struggling truth seeker.

I think people like Carlyle Marney, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Barbara Brown Taylor and John Spong would be excellent ministers-authors for students to study. These are classic thinkers, theologians, preachers, doubters and strugglers, and yet gifted examples of Christian authenticity. I suspect that they were often in doubt of their calling, but they struggled to be real, caring, and giving of themselves to whatever call they understood. To quote a great line from Tillich: "Doubt is not the opposite of faith but an element of it." That's true for all believers, ministers and seminary students included.

Timothy Moody
christiancentury.org comment

What Paulsell is talking about is not so much "faking it" as "trying something on." To experiment in the way Gandhi did, or the way divinity students might explore what direction they are called in, or even to go with what we know because it's all we've got to go on in the moment — that's being authentic. It's much different from "faking it," which is what happens, for example, to burned-out clergy who know they don't believe any more but keep on going because they're stuck.

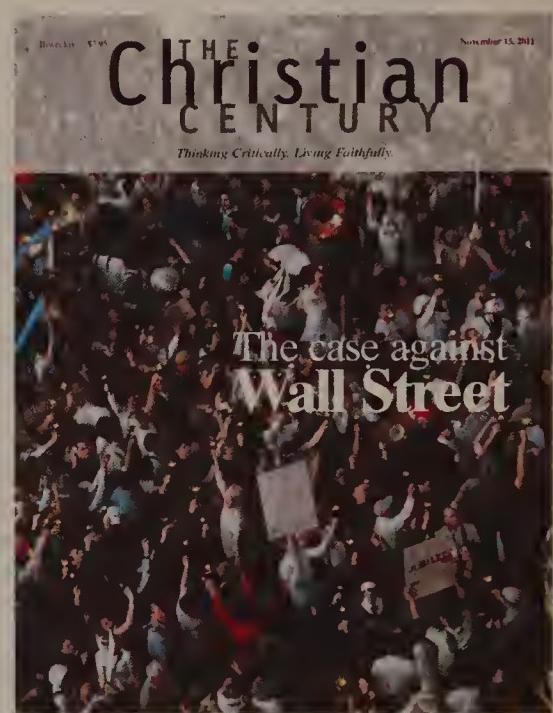
C. J. Green
christiancentury.org comment

I am wondering if Paulsell's students are being prepared for Christian ministry or for ordination into the "Church of Political Correctness," whose primary creed is that all religious traditions are of equal value, making the declaration "Jesus is Lord" a major PC heresy.

Bravo if Harvard seminary students feel hypocritical in preaching political

correctness while collecting their pay checks in the name of ministry for Jesus. Paulsell responds by spraying the consciences of her students with a little PC whitewash and sending them on their way to a phony ministry.

Barry H. Downing
Endwell, NY



Occupy ...

The editorial on the Occupy Wall Street movement ("Powerful occupation," Nov. 1) misses the point of this "new thing." One of my students told me that OWS is based on subsidiarity, the idea that local organizations may perform more effectively than dominant central organizations. So OWS makes consensus decisions for OWS New York, but never for Occupy Oakland, etc. OWS will never offer any specific remedies, nor will it ever have message discipline or concrete policies or primary principles.

Unlike the protests of the Vietnam era, OWS's purpose is to awaken people and jump-start democracy by embodying the kind of community they envision. Its

(Continued on page 51)

December 13, 2011

The 16 percent

In November, the Census Bureau released its new Supplemental Poverty Measure, according to which there are 49.1 million poor people in the U.S.—2.9 million more than were counted using the official formula. The official poverty rate is 15.1 percent for 2010, whereas the SPM puts it at 16 percent. Some criticized the SPM as an ideological stunt, while others praised it as more accurate than the standard measure. Whatever gauge is used, however, poverty is on the rise—it's been going up since 2007 and is at its highest rate since 1993.

The alternate numbers help illuminate the specific contours of poverty. The official poverty threshold is based on food prices and income, whereas the SPM looks also at other household expenses and at government assistance with food, housing and energy bills. The SPM uncovers some additional poor people, many of them seniors with high out-of-pocket medical expenses. Child poverty, however, turns out to be lower under the SPM, because a lot of government programs are aimed at families with children. At current levels, these programs alleviate child poverty, though they fall far short of eliminating it.

Federal poverty numbers determine eligibility for the services designed to lift people out of poverty, and they track overall progress toward achieving this. The point is not to debate which number to use, nor to discuss whether the current poverty rate is acceptable—it isn't. Poverty is measured in order to fight it.

How do we fight it? The child poverty numbers show the need for a stronger safety net; the numbers for seniors point to the need for more health-care reforms that curb costs. We also need government action to create jobs and to ensure that work pays enough to keep people out of poverty. Unfortunately, the political momentum is toward cutting the safety net, repealing existing health-care reforms, weakening labor laws and doing nothing about high unemployment.

This situation reflects the general dysfunction of our political system, but it points as well to the shortage of advocates for the poor. Republican lawmakers want to help businesses, which they say will eventually help everyone else, and Democrats focus on the middle class, as that's where the votes are. Even the Occupy movement's "99 percent" language has its problems: while it captures the crucial idea of solidarity among the poor and middle classes, it does so by reducing them to one big group, the not-wealthy.

The whole 99 percent have legitimate complaints, but the lowest percentiles are having an especially hard time. It's unacceptable for our government to ignore the rise in poverty, and it's inadequate merely to try to slow it down. We need to reverse the trend. While that's not easy to do in a bad economy, there's little evidence that we're even trying.

A record number of Americans are poor.
And the rate is rising.

CENTURY marks

GUTSY ACT: In 1934, a 17-year-old girl was about to go on stage to do a dance routine during amateur night at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. But the act preceding her featured a dance duo whose performance was so good that the girl decided she couldn't follow it with a dance. She decided to sing instead, even though she had never sung in public and didn't even know whether she could sing. That girl was named Ella Fitzgerald (interview with Michael Meade, *The Sun*, November).

TIME FOR SILENCE: When Job's friends first showed up, they sat with him in silence for seven days and nights (2:11–13). They should have kept their mouths closed. Rather than attending to Job's pain, they voiced their own ideas about justice and suffering. In her seminary course on grief, Janet L. Ramsey gives examples of what not to say to

people in deep pain: "This too will pass." "Your faith is strong enough to get you through." "I know how you feel." The most important thing is to be present and listen to the person and the Holy Spirit. Appropriate comments include an acknowledgment of the difficulty the person is facing and encouraging words about God's loving and abiding presence (*Word & World*, Fall).

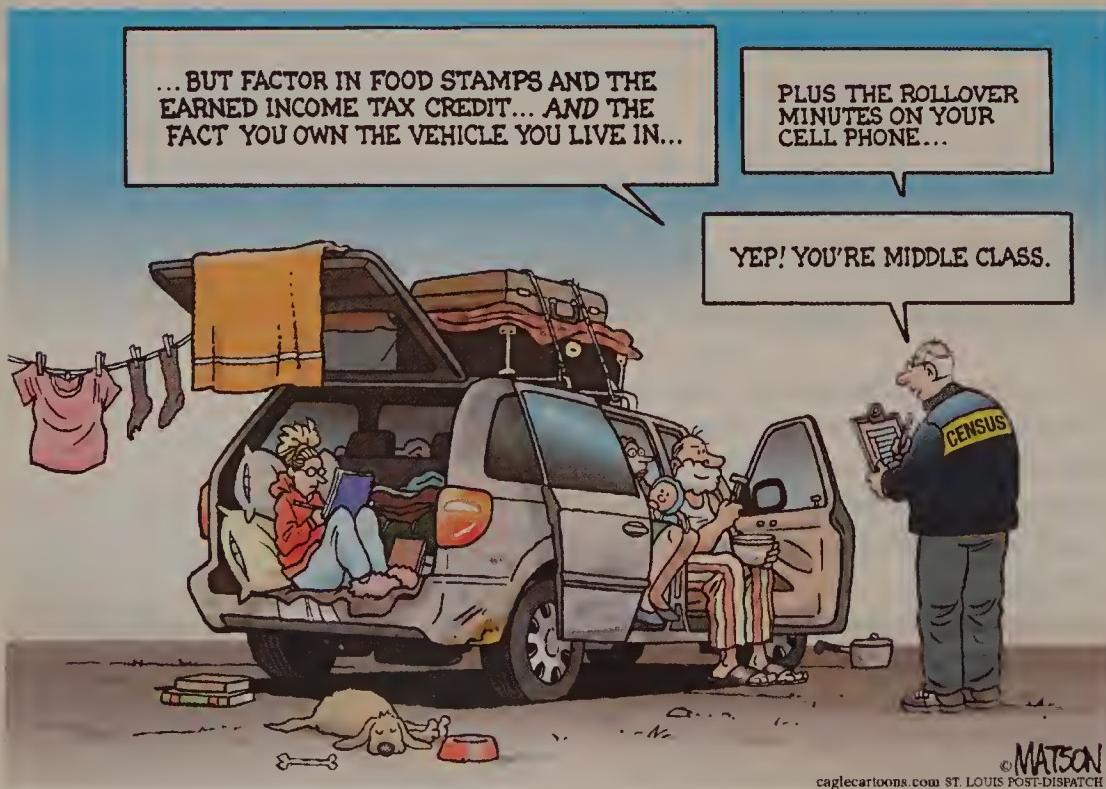
NUNS VS. CORPORATIONS: When Nora Nash of the Sisters of St. Francis met with executives from Goldman Sachs in New York, she had four demands: protect consumers, rein in executive pay, increase company transparency and remember the poor. The Sisters of St. Francis use moral suasion to influence corporate behavior. When the order decides to challenge a company's practices, it buys the minimum amount of stock needed to make resolu-

tions at stockholder meetings. The sisters have discovered that corporate executives would rather meet with them privately than be confronted publicly. Jack Welch, former GE executive, even flew by helicopter to a convent in Pennsylvania in order to meet with the nuns (*New York Times*, November 12).

TAXING THE 1 PERCENT: Obama's health-care reform is financed in large part by increasing the Medicare tax on the wealthiest of Americans and increasing taxes on investments. Those who make more than \$1 million a year would pay an additional \$37,381 in annual taxes. The top 400 taxpayers would pay, on average, an additional \$11 million annually (*Rolling Stone*, November 24).

LOST VICTIMS: Sexual abusers tend to be narcissistic and grandiose, says Father James Martin SJ, reflecting on the similarities between sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Church and those alleged to have taken place in the Penn State University football program. The narcissist thinks only of his own needs and personal gratification. Once a sexual abuser is called to account, he often focuses on his own suffering, thinking that a grave injustice has been done to him, and asks for sympathy. What's lost is concern for the victims (Guest Voices, *Washington Post*, November 13).

MANHOOD: Before Penn State played Nebraska in its first football game after the sexual abuse scandal broke, Ron Brown, Nebraska's assistant coach, led a prayer for both teams. He expressed concern for the alleged victims and added: "There are a lot of little boys around the country, today, who are watching this game. And they're trying



to figure out what the definition of manhood is all about. Father, this is it right here. I pray that this game will be a training ground of what manhood looks like." Brown has previously expressed his conviction that gay sex is sinful (Religion Dispatches, November 14).

SEX AND MARRIAGE: It is hard to imagine there was a time when contraception was illegal in the U.S. Some religious leaders helped legalize it. In 1932 Reinhold Niebuhr chaired a study committee of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, which issued a report endorsing the use of contraception. The statement argued that separating sex from reproduction contributes positively to marital love (*New Yorker*, November 14).

TO PRINCETON OR PRISON? The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate per capita of any country in the world. It is sixth in the world in its number of college graduates. National spending habits reveal a disturbing trend: it costs \$37,000 a year for a student to go to Princeton University, and \$44,000 per year to house an inmate at the New Jersey State Prison in Trenton. Between 1987 and 2007, higher education spending increased 21 percent, while corrections spending went up 127 percent (*Atlantic*, November).

CUT AND PASTE: In his later years Thomas Jefferson completed a project he had begun decades before: cutting and piecing together his own version of the Gospels. He worked with two texts each of English, French and a combined Latin-Greek New Testament. An admirer of Jesus' moral teachings, Jefferson was skeptical of the miracle stories and the resurrection, and he eliminated references to those events. The original bound version, which he called *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, is on display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Facsimiles of the book were given to incoming members of Congress until copies ran out half a century ago (*American Heritage* 61:2).

EPISTOLARY ART: Students at Amherst College were encouraged to

"Global warming is real."

— University of California, Berkeley, physicist Richard Muller, a climate change skeptic until he completed a two-year study (*Time*, November 14)

"God, grant us the austerity to defund America back into recession, courage to ignore basic economics, and wisdom to know everything we do can be reversed by a future Congress before any of it takes effect."

— An "Austerity Prayer" for the congressional budget supercommittee, written by cartoonist Brian McFadden as a spoof of the "Serenity Prayer" (*New York Times*, November 13).

"We cannot let others suffer simply because times are tough in the U.S. All Americans must understand the urgency of the human need and the effectiveness of our government's aid programs."

— Richard E. Stearns, president of World Vision USA, arguing against proposed cuts in federal spending for foreign aid (*Wall Street Journal*, November 11)

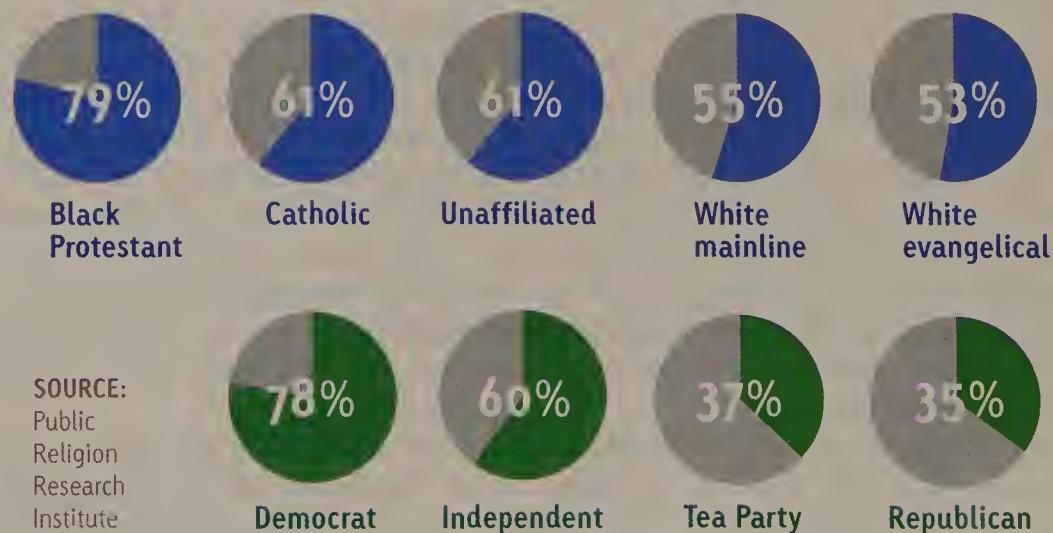
revive the traditional practice of letter writing using manual typewriters or paper with quill pens. Organized by the student activities office as a social event, the project attracted more than 300 students—about twice the number expected. Sealing wax was used to close the envelopes. A leader admitted that she needed to teach herself how to use one of the typewriters, which were purchased online. Some students vowed to continue the letter writing, and it was rumored that one student went to a typewriter store—there still is one in

Amherst, Massachusetts—to inquire about renting a manual typewriter.

ON DECK: A well-read Amish man told David McConnell, a professor at the College of Wooster, about his warm-up routine for reading a book: he first skims the table of contents, then he pages through the index. "It's like being in the on-deck circle," the man said. "You rub your hands, you spit, you watch the pitcher and then you have some idea of what's coming" (*Mennonite Quarterly Review*, October).

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Percent of Americans who think society would be better if wealth were distributed more equally:



Terra Brockman on food & feasting

Times of abundance

TERRA BROCKMAN is advocate for—and close observer of—sustainable agriculture. She founded an organization called *The Land Connection* that works to preserve farmland, train new farmers and connect people with local food. She lives in central Illinois and is the author of *The Seasons on Henry's Farm: A Year of Food and Life on a Sustainable Farm*.

What is life like at the farm after the harvest is over?

I call it the wabi-sabi time of year. Wabi-sabi is the Buddhist concept that everything changes; impermanence is itself a thing of beauty. My brother Henry says that this wabi-sabi season is all about “the beauty of sadness, and the sadness of beauty.” It is sad in one way to see the leaves fall, the basil blacken, and the tomato and other annual plants turn to mush. But all those dead plants break down and become food for fungi and bacteria and enhance next year’s crops.

On an aesthetic level, I love the stark beauty of winter. Everything is stripped away. You get down to the basic structure of things. You get to see in a new way.

What can farming teach us about feasting?

On the farm, there are natural feast times, times of abundance. When you have abundance, you tend to be really profligate with sharing. When the winter squashes come in, for example, any one that has a little softness in it needs to be shared and shared quickly.

My mom’s tradition is southern Italian Catholic. My grandma said they used to eat a crust of bread and half an

onion—that was their everyday food. Christmas Eve is very spartan in this tradition—dry spaghetti with salt cod. No olive oil even.

Christmas Day includes making ravioli together. We spend hours around a table making these raviolis with two fillings, one with ground beef from my dad’s cattle, and one of ricotta and winter greens. It is a feast of shared labor. This isn’t a feast where things just appear on the table. In American culture, we often have the idea of the feast appearing mag-



industrial agriculture has created a disconnect not only between people and the seasons, but between people’s food and their values of caring for others and stewarding the earth. The complicated and opaque food chain that goes

Good food is food that connects us to the earth and to other people.

ically from the kitchen without labor. We work to produce our feast, but the work is fun and every ravioli is different, oddly shaped, imperfect. They don’t look like ravioli from the freezer aisle. The participatory aspect is the most important part of the feast.

How is feasting balanced with times of less abundance?

In February and March, the months before we get the first wild and perennial greens, the root cellar and freezer are emptying out. We are not suffering, we are not hungry, but we are making do with what we have. With the apparent abundance in the grocery store all the time, many people have lost the art of making do and have lost a sense of the ebb and flow of the natural world.

Food is too often seen as an inanimate commodity, not something deeply connected to the earth. In fact, modern

through processors, manufacturers, packagers, shippers, advertisers and retailers is damaging to people and to the earth.

One way forward is to reboot our relationship with food—in times of abundance and times of scarcity—making it more local, more personal, more connected and meaningful.

You talk about the fun of making ravioli—but many people feel exhausted by the holiday season.

We’ve been persuaded by a \$5 billion advertising industry that “we are too busy,” or “this is so hard you can’t make it by yourself.” There are billions of dollars of propaganda actively discouraging people from doing simple, fun things and connecting with friends. I think part of my work is trying to open people up to life’s simple pleasures.

Holiday exhaustion—spiritual and

physical—comes, I think, from not getting together to enjoy and recharge. Making food together is energizing.

People have been misinformed to think that you need four hours to cook a meal. The quickest stir-fry is faster than the fastest fast food.

I have taken to eating a lot of food on toast lately—greens or mushrooms or radishes. It takes less than five minutes to put bread in the toaster oven and slice the radishes or stir-fry the greens as the bread is toasting. It's simple, delicious and satisfying.

Perhaps we are also uneasy with “imperfect” food?

I think that's true. We've been persuaded by advertising that an apple must be bright red and shiny. That view actually sets us up for a very disappointing taste experience—not to mention that apples top the list of the most pesticide-laden produce.

I learned about the importance of imperfection when I lived in Japan. In the Japanese tea ceremony, you have to use imperfect clay bowls because the aging, cracked, asymmetrical bowls force you to see beyond the surface to the spark of light and beauty within. The spark points to perfection within imperfection.

Food is not about some perfect size or color or presentation. It's about joining us to the earth, our fellow creatures, family, guests and ultimately God. It's about life here and now, about seeing the spark of light and beauty in our world and our lives, even with all their imperfection and unpredictability.

Can you say more about imperfection and feasting on the farm?

Every time we harvest vegetables or fruits on my brother Henry's or sister Teresa's farms, there are many things that aren't quite good enough to sell. Since they are “for us”—for the family and apprentices—we call them the “for-us-es”—the imperfect things, too ripe, too misshapen, too big, too small. Even though we can't sell these, they are often the most delicious. The tomatoes that are just on the edge of rotting, the pear with a bad spot. The imperfection is the perfection.

I just cooked up a bunch of “for us” squash. They had soft spots, but I carved them out and the imperfect squash came out perfectly delicious. Bug holes in the greens don't matter either, once you've cooked them. And a worm at the tip of an ear of sweet corn proves that there were no poisonous chemicals used on it.

My dad likes to tell the story of a friend who visited him in the watermelon patch. The friend said, enviously, “You probably get all the best watermelons.” My dad laughed, “No, we never get the best ones.” He showed him all the cracked, broken, slightly rotten watermelons that were in the “for us” pile and said, “These are the ones we eat.”

What's your message to those who don't live so close to the land?

Start with just one item—say, eggs. It's easy these days to go to Local-Harvest or other websites and type in “local eggs” and find a local farmer who raises them in a good way. You'll find that those eggs will be more delicious and more meaningful. If you get just a few items from a local farmer, or even a few herbs from your windowsill, you create a personal connection to food and to the people and place it came from. The bottom line is that good food is food that connects you to the earth and to others—it is a very real communion.

CC

—Amy Frykholm

Emmanuel

From the cave of darkness
a baby comes to light.

In the nick of time,
eternity tonight.

In a world of error
a perfect child is birthed.

In the midst of terror,
peace arrives on earth.

In the chill of winter
dawns this blazing son.

To a world of sinners
comes this sinless one.

In a land of chaos
speaks this single Word

whose voice can raise the dead,
whose promise can be heard.

Even as he cries
sleepers stir beneath the sod

for nothing is impossible
with God.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Rembrandt and the incarnation

Faces of Jesus

by Martin B. Copenhaver

TWO FACES fascinated Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) over the course of his long and singular career—his own face and the face of Jesus.

More than 90 self-portraits, spanning almost the entire length of the artist's career, are a visual memoir that is as searching and comprehensive, in its own way, as Augustine's *Confessions*. Rembrandt's visual meditations on the face of Jesus reflect momentous changes not only in Rembrandt's faith but in how people of his time envisioned Jesus. "Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus," at the Detroit Institute of Arts until February 12, 2012 (previous stops were at the Louvre and the Philadelphia Museum of Art), traces those changes by gathering together 64 Rembrandt paintings, etches and drawings that portray Jesus.

In the two centuries before Rembrandt, depictions of Jesus in northern European art followed established understandings of how Jesus should be portrayed. Two of the models for this visual canon, the Veil of Veronica and the Mandylion of Edessa, were supposed to have been miraculously imprinted with the face of Jesus when they were pressed to his face. A third source is the so-called Lentulus letter that, according to legend, was sent by a certain Publius Lentulus to the Roman senate during Jesus' lifetime. The description of Jesus contained in the letter was considered authoritative:

His hair is the color of ripe hazelnut, parted on top in the manner of the Nazarites, and falling straight to the ears but curling further below, with



blonde highlights and fanning off his shoulders. He has a fair forehead and no wrinkles or marks on his face, his cheeks are tinged with pink.... In sum, he is the most beautiful of all mortals.

In the centuries before Rembrandt, artistic renderings of Jesus followed these models and descriptions very closely, creating a uniformity that seemed to vouch for their authenticity. In them Jesus has a long, narrow nose, a high forehead and eyes that look—especially to the contemporary viewer—almost lifeless. In these depictions Jesus is always looking straight ahead, as if a mere turn of the head would betray an unseemly humanity. The overall effect is that Jesus seems strangely distant from things human. There is a decided flatness about these paintings, as if Jesus could take on two dimensions of human existence but not a third.

Rembrandt's own early work reflects some of these influences. In *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1644), Jesus' long, golden hair fans over his shoulders. His posture is perfect and he is a head taller than anyone else in the scene. As imagined in the Lentulus letter, Jesus is "the most beautiful of all mortals," a kind of superman.

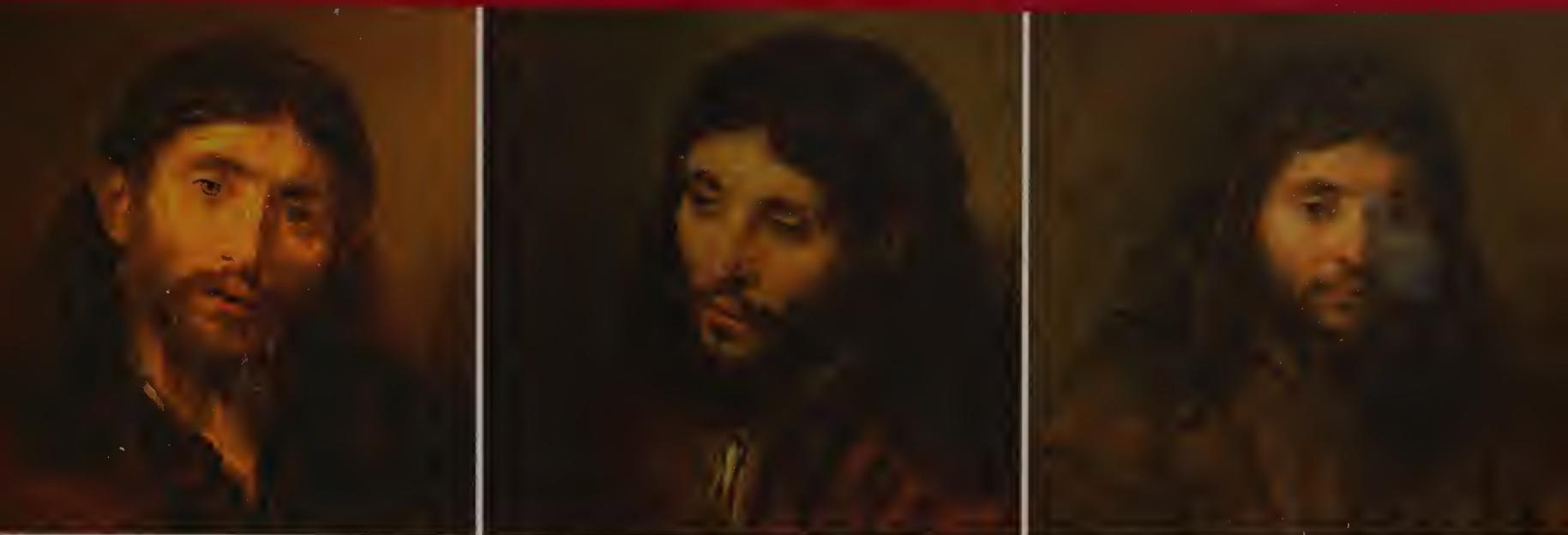
Just four years later, however, in his painting *Supper at Emmaus*, Rembrandt gives Jesus a different face. His nose is now prominent, his eyes are pensive. No

A small poem

To say thanks for reading this poem,
And all the other ones I've inflicted
Upon you over all these years. I did
Think, many times, of your gracious
Acceptance of that which you didn't
Ask for, and perhaps did not actually
Want; but I never said thanks, did I?
So I do. I wanted to... I don't know,
Connect, somehow, though we don't
Know each other; maybe that is why
I so wanted to connect, so often with
Just a little poem, like this. It matters
To connect, in some sweet holy way,
More than we can gauge. My sincere
Thanks for the gift of your attention;
Witness is our great work. You knew
That, I know—I'm just reminding us.

Brian Doyle

Martin B. Copenhaver is senior pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church (UCC) in Massachusetts and the author, with Lillian Daniel, of *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers* (Eerdmans).



Left to right: Christ, c. 1648–50, Detroit Institute of Arts/Founders Society Purchase; Bust of Christ, c. 1648–52, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums/Gift of William A. Coolidge; Head of Christ, c. 1648, Gemaldegalerie, Berlin, Germany; Christ, c. 1656, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands. All images from the Bridgeman Art Library.

longer does Jesus have the posture of a soldier. His shoulders are rounded and his head is tilted slightly (it is amazing how a mere tilt of the head can communicate humanity). His hair is dark and thick, draping over his shoulders in ringlets. This Jesus is obviously human—and this was something new. From near the beginning of Christian history, the doctrine of the incarnation was consistently affirmed by the church. With Rembrandt's new depictions, the viewer was invited to consider what incarnation actually looked like.

One of the etchings in this exhibit is familiar to me; I have a copy of it in my study. It shows Jesus preaching to a small

assembly. A child lies on his belly and draws in the dirt with his fingers, much as a child today might draw on an order of worship with a crayon. A few others gaze off into space, lost in reflection. Most have their eyes riveted on the preacher.

If we, with the crowd, focus on Jesus, we notice nothing about his appearance that sets him apart. There is nothing prepossessing in his stature or countenance. His hands are large—workman's hands, hands that have served long hours. His face could not be called beautiful. I'm reminded of Isaiah's words: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2). If his fig-

ure were put in the crowd of listeners, we might not even notice him. But if our eyes shift back to the listeners, we appreciate that they see more than this. They know that this is no backwoods faith huckster. On the contrary, this is the one upon whom everything depends. His face is not so ugly that only a mother could love it, but it is so plain that only the faithful can see God in it. And see it they do.

A child once stared at that etching and asked, "Who's that?" I replied, "That's Jesus." "Oh," the child responded, more than a little surprised, "I didn't recognize him." And little wonder. He looks so everyday that it should not surprise us

Jesus were set apart, we might assume that only a fool would not see the living God in him. We would wonder why so many fools lived at the time Jesus walked the earth, people who had the advantage of seeing him with their own eyes and yet did not acknowledge him. The reason, of course, is that the human eye is not enough. Only the eye of faith can see Jesus Christ.

The centerpiece of this exhibit is a series of seven small oil portraits of Jesus (there may have once been an eighth), gathered together for the first time since they stood in Rembrandt's studio more than 350 years ago. The paintings show the face of Jesus from different angles and in various states of mind. The predominant mood in these paintings is meditative, in some way mirroring Rembrandt's pensive self-portraits from this same period. Gone is the Jesus as superman. Gone are the crowds surrounding Jesus. These paintings are a personal face-to-face encounter between an artist and his Savior, both of whom have tasted human sorrow. Two of these paintings were kept in Rembrandt's bedroom, an appropriately intimate place for such personal meditations on canvas.

In the coming weeks countless sermons will strive to express the mystery of the incarnation. After seeing "Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus," I'm sure that no sermon will usher us into that mystery more powerfully than these portraits of Jesus do. In their eloquent silence, these paintings are the most profound witness to the incarnation that I can imagine.

Rembrandt's portraits reflect his meditations on Jesus as Savior.

that Rembrandt most likely found models for his portraits of Jesus by wandering the largely Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam where he lived. In Rembrandt's Amsterdam, using a human model for Jesus was itself a scandal, a scandal that would only be amplified by choosing a Jewish model.

In many pictures that hang in church schoolrooms (or in our mind's eye), Jesus is made to stand apart in his humanity, as if his humanity were somehow different from ours. We are led to believe that if we saw him at a lunch counter or stuck in a traffic jam, we would know him. The human eye would be enough to perceive that this one is different from all others. If

Seminary aims to offer free education

by John Dart
 News Editor

More than half of the graduates at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary this year borrowed an average of \$20,600 to earn their master's degree—not an uncommon handicap for seminarians today as they await a call to ministry or seek other employment.

But in a bold venture believed to be unique for mainline seminaries, the Kentucky school affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently adopted a long-range plan to provide full scholarships for all master's degree candidates by fall 2015 and stipends to cover living expenses by fall 2021.

Many students enter graduate studies already encumbered by loans from their undergraduate days. At Louisville Seminary, officials said that incoming students that have such debt have owed between \$23,000 and \$25,000. Annual tuition at Louisville is about \$10,200 a year.

In order to achieve the full-scholarship goal, Louisville Seminary reduced its master's program enrollment from its current average of 150 students down to 130. "Capping the size of entering classes will make full funding of each student an achievable goal with a relatively short time frame," said Patrick Cecil, vice-president and CFO at Louisville.

Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, said in an interview that the recently announced plan "truly addresses the student debt issue in a positive way."

Seminaries within the Southern Baptist Convention have not charged tuition. "They charge a small fee that grows a little bit each year," Aleshire said, "but there are few theological schools that

don't charge tuition besides SBC schools —funding comes from the denomination or from other sources."

Aleshire added that Louisville Seminary's plan is unique for mainline churches in two ways: "One, by not educating more students than the church can use, and two, by graduating students with virtually no debt so they are free to accept a wide range of opportunities." It has been widely reported that ever-fewer congregations can employ a full-time pastor—and without a decent-paying ministry new graduates cannot make enough money fast enough to pay off their debt.

Scholarships covering tuition and living expenses, to be funded by a fund-raising campaign over ten years, may put the seminary in position to admit Presbyterians and other students "with real potential for leadership," as Michael Jenkins, the school's president, put it. "Liberated from additional educational debt, our graduates will be enabled to serve wherever God calls them."

Dean-elect Susan R. Garrett added: "Emphasis will be on achieving the highest quality, rather than quantity, of entering students. At the same time, we will seek to admit classes that reflect the racial, ethnic, national and theological diversity in which our graduates will serve." The comprehensive plan envisions preparing seminarians for interfaith dialogue, expanding its black church studies and maintaining updated communications techniques.

"At this time, I don't know of another school, at least in the mainline, that is contemplating reduced enrollment and increased endowment so [it] can provide tuition and living expenses," said Aleshire of the Pittsburgh-based ATS, which oversees certification policies for about 260 seminaries in the U.S. and Canada.

The step "makes sense" for a denomination like the PCUSA, he said, "where there are more seminary graduates in the past several years seeking ordination of word and sacrament than there are congregations open to first-call pastors."



ADDRESSING STUDENT DEBT: Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary president Michael Jenkins (left) has overseen a plan to provide scholarships to master's degree candidates by fall 2015 and stipends to cover living expenses by fall 2021.

Experts: Sexual predators hidden in plain sight

The abuse allegations at Penn State seem unthinkable: revered assistant coach and prominent community activist Jerry Sandusky preying on eight children. But such abuses of trust occur repeatedly across the country.

Experts say respected people who set up charitable or social groups for children, only to be implicated in some form of child sexual abuse, are a frightening reality.

"I call them 'institutions of trust,'" said Portland, Oregon, attorney Kelly Clark, who has represented more than 300 sexual abuse victims. Some predators are so tacitly trusted "that when something like this happens, the instinctive reaction is, 'That can't happen here. We can't allow the mission to be compromised,'" he said.

Abuse experts say the common denominator in many such crimes is the willingness of parents to allow noted people to have unrestricted access to their kids.

Among recent cases:

- A Utah judge sentenced a 70-year-old orphanage cofounder to three consecutive terms of five years to life in prison after he pleaded guilty to three counts of abuse. Lon Kennard originally faced 43 counts dating to 1995, but most charges were dropped as part of a plea deal. Kennard's victims included six children adopted from Ethiopia, where he and his wife helped establish an orphanage.

- A Miami jury on November 10 returned a \$100 million verdict against a retired Roman Catholic priest accused of sexually abusing dozens of boys since the 1980s in the city's Little Haiti neighborhood. More than 20 people say Neil Doherty, 68, trolled for victims wearing his priest's collar.

- In Portland, Oregon, a jury last year awarded a 38-year-old former Boy Scout \$1.4 million, finding the national Boy Scouts of America and a local council negligent in a sexual abuse case involving an assistant scoutmaster and convicted pedophile.

"A pedophile is going to go where

Accused bishop gets deal to avoid second indictment

A CATHOLIC BISHOP in Missouri has avoided a second criminal charge for failing to report suspected child abuse by agreeing to allow prosecutors to oversee similar allegations against church officials in their county for the next five years.

Bishop Robert Finn of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph will not face prosecution in Clay County on the misdemeanor charge if he fulfills the agreement.

The deal allows the Clay County prosecutors to review the diocese's handling of every accusation of child abuse in their jurisdiction for the next five years.

The agreement does not affect Finn's fate in neighboring Jackson County, where he was indicted for failing to report suspected child abuse in October.

Finn is the highest-ranking Catholic official in the U.S. to face criminal charges for not telling law enforcement that a priest under his supervision had been accused of child sexual abuse. The charges stem from Finn's admission that he knew that a priest in his diocese had hundreds of images of alleged child pornography on his computer but did not tell the police for five months.

To avoid prosecution in Clay County, Finn is required to report

monthly to Prosecuting Attorney Daniel White for the next five years and "apprise him of any and all reported suspicious or alleged abuse activities involving minors."

"This will be a learning experience for the bishop," White said in a statement. "The diocese and the bishop acknowledge past reporting systems had flaws; injecting an outsider into the mix—an outsider who can trigger a criminal investigation and file charges—gives parents and children in our community confidence that if anything were to happen, it will be promptly and effectively addressed."

Finn also agreed to visit all Clay County parishes and outline the notification programs that his diocese is implementing to protect minors. "This agreement provides a structure for us to maintain an open dialogue about any and all issues of abuse of minors within Catholic parishes and institutions in Clay County," Finn said in a statement November 15.

Advocates for victims of clergy sexual abuse criticized the deal. "The truth surfaces in court," said Peter Isley of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. "That's what bishops work overtime to avoid. And that's what Finn has achieved here." —Daniel Burke, RNS

they have access to children," said Richard Serbin, an Altoona, Pennsylvania, attorney who has represented 150 clergy sexual abuse victims statewide since 1987. He said the Penn State allegations parallel the Catholic Church scandals. In each case, he said, the institution unwittingly lent predators access and respectability.

Washington, D.C., journalist Patrick Boyle, author of the 1994 book *Scout's Honor: Sexual Abuse in America's Most Trusted Institution*, said reaction to the Catholic Church's sexual abuse complaints and those against the Boy Scouts of America was similar. "In both cases,

there was a lot of willful ignorance among the higher-ups," he said. "They almost tried not to know things."

Serbin said Penn State head football coach Joe Paterno's response to sexual abuse suspicions was "disappointing." Paterno allegedly reported the incident to a supervisor without summoning the police or pursuing the matter further.

"It appears to me that no one wanted to ask the pertinent questions," Serbin said.

Clark also sees similarities to the sexual abuse complaints against the Boy Scouts; he estimates that about 50 to 60 cases involving Scouts are pending in

courts nationwide. "I call it 'borrowed credibility,'" Clark said.

Boy Scouts of America spokesman Deron Smith said that over 101 years, 150 million young men have been Scouts. He said the organization takes abuse seriously. Since 1990, he said, the Boy Scouts have included a pamphlet titled "How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide" with every handbook.

Since 2003, the Boy Scouts of America has required criminal background checks of all new volunteers, and it stipulates that at least two adults must supervise all activities. It also requires mandatory reporting—to the police and the local Scouting council—of "any reasonable suspicion of inappropriate conduct with youth."

In the Penn State case, "everybody seems to have done the minimum, instead of doing the maximum or more, which is what we'd expect of these institutions," Boyle said. "If you can give 110 percent on the field, why can't you give 110 percent for the victims?"

—Greg Toppo, USA Today

Hip-hop embraced as an evangelistic tool

It's hard to get young people into the pews on a Sunday morning, but several seminaries think they have found a way to grab the next generation: hip-hop.

"If we're going to take young people seriously, we have no choice," said Alton B. Pollard III, dean of the Howard University School of Divinity. "When we talk about what's happening in the lives of young people, that's a subterranean culture that some of us just don't know how to get with."

Howard's recent annual convocation featured the rocking beat of Christian hip-hop artists Da' T.R.U.T.H. and Sean Simmonds, and professors are using the spoken word—poetry performed as social commentary—to examine the New Testament.

At Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee, several professors analyze hip-hop music in their classes as they study protest music. At

Northern Seminary in Lombard, Illinois, the 2005 book *The Hip-Hop Church* is used in courses on youth ministry.

"In order to be relevant, in order to do youth ministry, you can't do ministry without engaging hip-hop," said Maisha Handy, who has taught a course on hip-hop and Christian education for two years at Atlanta's Interdenominational Theological Center.

Howard's Pollard concedes that seminaries "have come a little late to the dance," but says it's better to embrace hip-hop rather than be intimidated by it. And though some churchpeople might cringe at the genre's misogynistic, violent and drug-related undertones, churches had a similar reaction to jazz and the blues.

"Some artists do definitely exhibit egregious behavior and that behavior should never be condoned," said Joshua Wright, a sociologist at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, speaking at a hip-hop panel at Howard. "But this does not make all hip-hop artists devil worshipers."

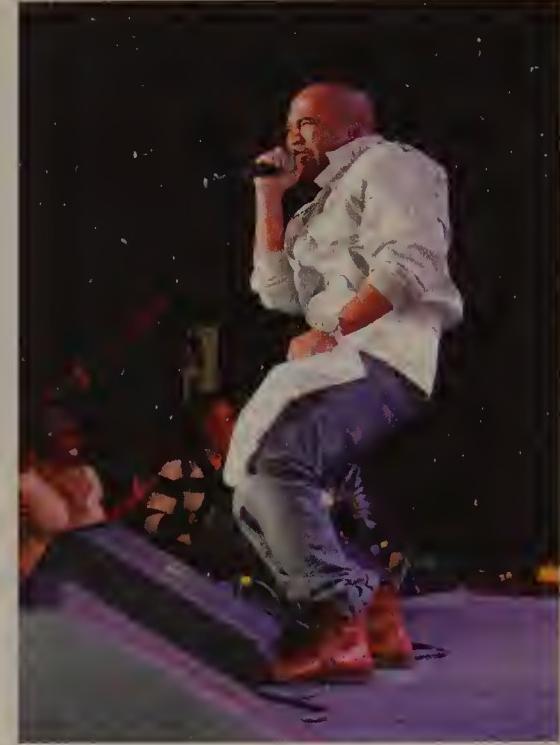
Wright pointed to Christian hip-hop artists—self-described "misfits" who are caught between two worlds—as an example of how hip-hop can be harnessed for good.

Michael Eric Dyson, a Georgetown University scholar who teaches a class on hip-hop superstar Jay-Z, said religious critics of hip-hop need to look at their own leaders.

"As much as you want to dog a rapper and steamroll his or her lyrics, steamroll some sermons, too, of the bishops and the imams and the rabbis," said Dyson, who was headed to a concert featuring Jay-Z and Kanye West. Dyson spoke there in an open collar, and advocates say dressing down is just one way some churches can indicate an openness to hip-hop culture.

"Maybe we need some fitted caps on Sunday," said Willie J. Thompson Jr., an assistant pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in Springdale, Maryland, who helped coordinate Howard's Christian hip-hop concert. "Maybe we need to dress down. Maybe we need to change some of the things that we've become accustomed to."

Hip-hop artists say part of the prob-



SANDY WATERS / HOWARD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

OPEN TO HIP-HOP: Christian hip-hop artist Sean Simmonds performs at a convocation at Howard University School of Divinity.

lem is that churches are too traditional, too rigid. "I am young, gifted, eccentric and artistic, but I am not religious," said Oraia, a white female spoken-word artist who appeared onstage at Howard between black male artists. "I don't worship tradition."

Kayeen Thomas, a first-year student at Washington's Wesley Theological Seminary and a hip-hop performer, said the church has much to learn from hip-hop's Christian and not-so-Christian aspects. One tends to focus on the suffering of Jesus; the other on the suffering of the streets.

"The last time I performed, I did a Christian rap song, and I did a song about Troy Davis," Thomas said, referring to the recently executed Georgia inmate who became a rallying cry for alleged racial disparities in capital punishment.

Thomas, who comes from the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, hopes eventually to lead conferences on hip-hop as a tool for evangelism. "It does have the ability to be used not only to bring souls to Christ but also to change lives, to inspire people to do better," he said. "For you to ignore a medium that has a potential to be so powerful is a huge, huge mistake on the part of the church." —Adelle M. Banks, RNS

Antiabortion analogy is flawed but popular

Is legalized abortion akin to the Nazi Holocaust? The analogy is a standard talking point among abortion opponents, and a new half-hour video by a prominent Christian apologist has gone viral by making the comparison more explicit and graphic than any antiabortion sound bite on the evening news.

But the success of the video and the popularity of the argument raise the broader question of whether comparing legalized abortion to the Holocaust—or to slavery, another widespread analogy—is logical and legitimate, even if it is effective.

The new Internet movie is called *180*, a title meant to signal that viewers will do a U-turn from their previous support for abortion rights. In many respects, it's a standard piece of propaganda in the culture wars.

The video was produced by Ray Comfort, a controversial evangelical Christian from New Zealand who announces at the start of the video that he is Jewish, though in fact his father was a gentile and he was raised without religious instruction. Comfort became a born-again Christian in his early twenties.

For the first half of *180*, Comfort interweaves chilling clips of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi death camps with street-level interviews of young people who display fairly predictable ignorance about the Holocaust (and much else). He then pivots to make a connection between what he's told them about the attempted genocide of the Jews and modern-day legalized abortion.

Scales fall from eyes and minds are miraculously changed, at least in Comfort's careful, if self-serving, editing. "What's a pretty good documentary could have been even stronger without the fools early on," as *Christianity Today's* Mark Moring put it.

But middling reviews and even blistering criticism are hardly going to sink *180*. The Holocaust analogy is so powerful that opponents of abortion don't need to examine it very closely, while

supporters of abortion rights simply dismiss it out of hand without really refuting it.

So what is wrong with the comparison? The most obvious and common objection is that it deeply offends Jewish sensibilities, even more so when abortion foes use the power of raw numbers to argue that abortion is actually worse than the Holocaust.

"Nearly 60 million Americans have been slaughtered by abortion, and that's ten times the amount of Jews who died under the Nazis," argued Comfort in responding to critics like Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who said those who compare the Holocaust to abortion "prove that they do not know what the Holocaust was."

For a number of antiabortion critics, the problems go beyond respecting the memory of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Instead, they say the analogy has holes that undermine the credibility of campaigns against abortion and can ultimately harm the movement's ability to make its case to the wider culture.

One major flaw in the Holocaust logic, they note, is that the U.S. government is not mandating that women have abortions—unlike the Third Reich, which ordered the extermination of Jews and other classes of people. "At this point in time, neither state nor federal governments require pregnant women to kill their unborn children, regardless of the women's circumstances or the unborn children's condition," Teresa Collett, an antiabortion advocate who teaches at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, has written in critiquing the Holocaust comparison.

"To employ the language of constitutional law, abortions are not state actions, unlike the imprisonment and killing of the Jews by the Nazis," Collett wrote in an exchange on the topic at Mirror of Justice, a popular blog on Catholic legal theory.

Another problem is that even if one considers abortion to be murder, it does not automatically make women who have abortions murderers. "The mothers who choose abortion often feel as though they have no other choice, and

admittedly, the choices they face often are not easy ones," Robert Vischer, another law professor at St. Thomas, argued in the Mirror of Justice debate.

"I do not think that choosing to kill their unborn children is the answer, but choosing that answer does not make them the moral equivalents of the Nazis, and neither does our government's willingness to permit them that choice."

In a widely cited 2008 essay in *Commonweal* magazine, a liberal Catholic periodical, Cathleen Kaveny, who teaches law and theology at the University of Notre Dame, noted several other problems with the analogy.

One is that the Nazis would have jailed or even killed anyone who helped Jews escape persecution. "In contrast, the pro-life movement in the United States has a strong political voice," Kaveny wrote. "Ongoing efforts to convince women to carry their pregnancies to term, and to give those women assistance in doing so, are entirely legal and legitimate, and often effective. Crisis pregnancy centers are not analogous to the 'secret annex' in *The Diary of Anne Frank*."

A final problem that both Kaveny and Collett highlighted is that comparing legalized abortion to the Holocaust implies that the U.S. government deserves the same fate as Nazi Germany—namely, to be overthrown. And that's a logical conclusion few if any antiabortion activists are going to make.

Still, a number of antiabortion activists who agree that the Holocaust comparison is flawed say critics need to come up with a better substitute, and so far they haven't. That means that the comparison isn't likely to go away anytime soon.

Though the argument can wind up turning off as many people as it convinces, its emotional appeal is amplified by its apparent simplicity—and by the frustration that many abortion opponents feel over their inability to end what they see as a monstrous injustice. There's an old saying that "every analogy limps," meaning that no comparison is perfect. But that doesn't mean that an analogy can't run away with an argument. —David Gibson, RNS

After Mississippi defeat, what about ‘personhood’?

The failure of the “personhood” initiative in Mississippi in November intensified what appears to be a growing divide in the antiabortion movement.

Some backers of the initiative, which aimed to make abortion illegal by defining a fetus as a person from the moment of conception, are pointing fingers at major antiabortion groups that stood on the sidelines during the Mississippi debate.

“What you have is a few organizations that are moving in the wrong direction on the issue of life,” said Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel, a leading conservative law firm that provided advice to the initiative’s sponsors.

Staver said he blames Americans United for Life (AUL) and the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC)—two of the largest and most established anti-abortion groups—for an “impasse” in the movement that contributed to a loss at the polls.

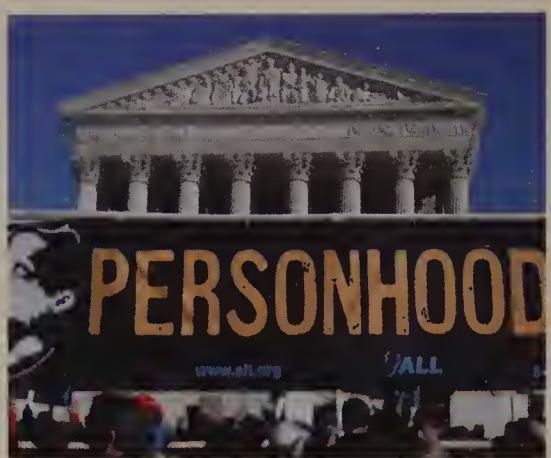
“The split is not good,” Staver said of the divide between more-established groups and the more-confrontational groups that backed the Personhood initiative. “They want to be too conservative, too cautious. We need to move forward with a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*.”

Also sitting out the debate: the Roman Catholic Church, a giant in the antiabortion movement.

More than 55 percent of Mississippi voters on November 8 rejected the initiative, which would have declared that life begins at fertilization. Many saw the case as the first volley in a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

Personhood USA, which twice tried and failed to pass a similar ballot measure in Colorado, attracted support for the Mississippi measure from several prominent groups that oppose abortion rights, including the Family Research Council and the American Family Association.

It blamed the abortion rights group Planned Parenthood, which campaigned against the initiative, for its defeat. Opponents, including some religious groups, argued that the initiative was unconstitu-



ABORTION BATTLE: The Colorado-based Personhood USA movement lost its third consecutive statewide fight on November 8 in Mississippi but is planning additional ballot measures in other states.

tional and poorly constructed and would have made several forms of birth control and in vitro fertilization techniques illegal.

After the recent defeat, the AUL defended its decision to stay on the sidelines. AUL spokeswoman Kristi Hamrick said the measure, even if it had passed, was not in direct conflict with *Roe v. Wade* and wouldn’t have led to its overthrow.

Asked about Staver’s charge that the AUL is too cautious, she said: “Pro-life organizations who agree on the need to build toward test cases that can overturn *Roe v. Wade* may not all agree on the best course of action, but friends can engage in separate strategies. It’s not one-size-fits-all.”

The NRLC issued a statement focusing on state legislative wins in 2011 that restricted access to abortion. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops referred questions on the initiative to its dioceses in Mississippi.

At the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi, spokeswoman Shirley Henderson said several people have called to express concern that the church had not thrown its weight behind the initiative. “I know most of the Catholics in our diocese were disappointed that it did not pass,” she said. “Supposedly, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is hoping to reverse *Roe v. Wade* on the national level.”

Jennifer Mason, spokeswoman for Personhood USA, said the group is now focused on getting similar measures on the ballot in several other states: Montana, Ohio, Florida, Nevada and California. “Next time we will have even more friends,” Mason said. —Lauren Markoe, RNS

FBI accused of using Islamophobic materials

Religious leaders from Christian, Jewish and interfaith organizations have called on the White House to convene an interagency task force to investigate and resolve concerns over recent allegations that the federal government has used biased and misleading materials about Islam to train personnel for homeland security.

In a letter to Deputy National Security Adviser John Brennan, the religious leaders cited as examples a consultant who in addressing the Washington FBI field office called Islamic Shari‘a law a threat to United States law and an FBI report asserting that wearing traditional Muslim attire or frequently attending a mosque are signs that an individual might be a “homegrown Islamic extremist.”

Such training “casts suspicion on an entire religious community whose adherents are merely exercising their First Amendment right to freely exercise their faith,” the leaders said.

Signers of the letter included Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty; Welton Gaddy, president of the Interfaith Alliance; Jennifer Butler, executive director of Faith in Public Life; Steven Martin, executive director of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good; and leaders of several mainline Protestant and Jewish groups.

In the meantime, the Council on American-Islamic Relations says 15 of its chapters nationwide have filed 87 separate public-records requests about possible Islamophobic training of local, state and national law enforcement personnel.

The Washington-based CAIR said November 15 it seeks information about state-level trainings that may have used federal taxpayer dollars to fund anti-Muslim trainers.

“We firmly believe that good training leads to good investigations, while biased training leads to biased investigations,” a CAIR statement said. —ABP

New Jersey leads U.S. in fewer divorces

New Jersey is derided for *Jersey Shore*, aggressive driving and residents who talk too fast, but when it comes to “happily ever after,” the Garden State is no. 1. A recent U.S. Census report shows that the Northeast—and New Jersey in particular—has the lowest divorce rate in America, trailed closely by New York.

The Bible Belt, meanwhile, home to southern hospitality, church telethons and country music, has more “shotgun” weddings and the most divorces.

“People assume that people in the Northeast divorce easily because they’re less religious, but that’s not the case,” said Deborah Carr, a professor of sociology at Rutgers University.

In the Northeast, 7.2 per 1,000 men and 7.5 per 1,000 women got divorced. In the South, the rates were 10.2 for men and 11.1 for women. New Jersey’s rates were 6.1 for men and 6.0 for women, according to an American Community Survey.

Even though Jean Grossman is from New Jersey, her story mirrors those statistics. When she first moved to Texas, it was a classic case of culture shock.

“I thought I had landed on the moon,” said Grossman, 59, a native of Oradell, New Jersey. After getting married, she moved in 1984 with her husband to Dallas, where he was pursuing a business opportunity. “I thought we were going into ‘happily ever after,’” she said.

“Nobody in my family had ever gotten divorced,” said Grossman, who now works as a divorce coach. Almost a decade later, in 1993, she asked her husband to move out, and they divorced three years later. Still living in the South, Grossman started a relationship with the man who would become her second husband, then returned to New Jersey in 2006.

The South sees more divorce for several reasons, Carr said:

- First, southerners tend to marry young, partly due to a lower rate of college attendance.

- Second, couples don’t usually move in together while unwed, a trend tied to religious beliefs. They often frown upon birth control and are “more likely to

have nonmarital pregnancies, which . . . then trigger ‘shotgun’ marriages.”

- Third, there are simply more marriages in the South. New Jersey had the second-lowest marriage rates, just above Maine. The Census survey reported that while New Jersey’s marriage rate is 14.8 for men and 13.3 for women, Georgia’s is 22.1 and 20.4, respectively.

Though the South’s marriage rate is 20.3, the West is highest, at 20.7. Wyoming was the single state with the highest marriage rates for both men (30.7) and women (28.7). And though it’s not a southern state, Alaska ranks like one, with the highest divorce rate for women, at 16.2 (the highest rate for men is in Arkansas at 13.5).

While the national median age for a woman’s first marriage is 26.5 and 28.4 for men, in New Jersey, people tend to get married at an older age; the median age for women is 28 and 30.2 for men.

—Amy Kuperinsky, RNS

Supreme Court sidesteps issue of roadside crosses

The Supreme Court says it will not reopen a case in which a lower court ruled that highway crosses memorializing Utah state troopers are unconstitutional.

The court decision October 31 was harshly criticized by Justice Clarence Thomas, the lone dissenter. He said it “rejects an opportunity to provide clarity” to an area of church-state law that is “in shambles.”

Dave Silverman, president of American Atheists, which filed the suit in 2005, said he hopes the court’s announcement will bring the case to an end and lead to an alternative way of honoring troopers who died in the line of duty.

“Erecting divisive religious icons that violate the very Constitution the fallen troopers had sworn to uphold is not the way to honor those troopers who gave the ultimate sacrifice for the citizens of their state,” he said.

The conservative Alliance Defense Fund, which asked the court to consider the case, was disappointed. “Justice is not well served when unhappy atheists can use the law to mow down memorial crosses

and renew the suffering for the survivors,” said ADF senior counsel Byron Babione.

The Utah Highway Patrol Association had erected 12-foot white crosses to honor fallen officers since 1998. The atheist group lost its first legal challenge, but the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last year that the memorials “have the impermissible effect of conveying to the reasonable observer the message that the state prefers or otherwise endorses a certain religion.” —RNS

Briefly noted

■ While noting “deep disagreements” in their denomination, the United Methodist Council of Bishops has promised to uphold church law that bans same-sex unions. It was the first time the council has addressed as a body the long-fought controversy. More than 1,000 UMC clergy this year have vowed that they may perform such unions. Thousands of clergy and laity, in response, petitioned the bishops council to make a firm response to “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions,” as described in the Methodists’ Book of Discipline. The letter issued November 11 was drafted by the bishops’ Unity Task Force, which is chaired by Minnesota area Bishop Sally Dyck. Over the past three years, the group has met with unofficial caucuses that represent opposing views on gay rights in church life.

■ Teams from the Baptist World Alliance and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople concluded exploratory talks on November 2 that could lead to formal dialogue between Baptist and Orthodox Christians internationally. BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, who led the Baptist delegation, described the aims of the meeting held in Crete as responding to the Lord’s prayer in John 17:21 for his disciples “that they may all be one . . . that the world may believe.” “We believe that we should continue to explore our common ground in biblical teaching, apostolic faith and tradition as well as practical Christian witness, together with our remaining differences,” said Callam, who works in the BWA headquarters in Fall Church, Virginia.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, December 18

Luke 1:26–38; 46b–55

THIS MONTH millions of families around the world will gather dutifully and joyfully for a traditional ritual meal. Around the edges of some of the more traditional gatherings—the ones where the chief chefs and hosts are grandparents or the age of grandparents—the siblings and cousins of the next-oldest generation will begin to talk together. A whispered conspiracy may take shape with these words, “One of us has to host the family next year; we can’t ask Mom and Dad to do it again. It’s getting to be too much for them.”

“And besides, they don’t seem to really enjoy it.”

“I know. They work so hard to make everything happen. They never sit and relax.”

“Not only that, while we’re eating they start washing dishes, preparing the turkey carcass for soup and making up take-home plates for everyone. We never actually get to see or talk to them.”

“Even when we’re just sitting around talking, one of them is puttering around, picking up or making beds. It’s too much.”

Perhaps the members of the younger generation are rightly identifying an issue. But we can imagine that if they saw the grandparents in a moment not protected by a patina of latent humble martyrdom or tendencies toward edgy control, they might see a smile on a grandparent’s face or a shared look between the couple that signaled contentment with their work.

Such grandparents are rich with a secret joy rooted in a deep spiritual truth. They know that the Christian quest for contentment is not achieved by *being* at home or at rest—not even when we’re with our families. We are strangers and pilgrims on earth. Our place is no place; our place is every place; our rest is no rest. Our richest contentment and joy as Christians is realized when we *make* a place, a home, a rest for others.

In the latest Lutheran liturgical calendar, December 20 is set aside for the remembrance of Katharina von Bora, Martin Luther’s wife. The condensed biography is this: When Katie was a nun, she was among those who were sympathetic to the calls for reforming to the Roman Catholic Church. During the protests, she and several of her sister nuns fled the convent. When the dust settled, Katie was without a home. All the other nuns who deserted the convent found husbands fairly quickly, but not Katie. Finally Martin Luther proposed to her and offered her a home.

Luther called her “the morning star of Wittenberg” because she rose at 4 a.m. every day. She cooked and fed the household, bred cattle, brewed beer and ministered to the sick. She provided a home for six children of her own, four orphans (including her own nephew) and a constant stream of Luther’s students from the university. Surely she was sometimes resentful, irritable and exhausted.

Yet I suspect that if you caught Katie Luther in an unguarded moment you would sometimes see a gleam in her eye or a moment of contentment: she had discovered that in providing a home for others, she herself had become magnificently rich.

Which brings us to the archetype of hospitality: Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary was visited by Gabriel and called by God to find a place, to make a home for Jesus. Her body was to be that place. Her womb was to be the home of God. Part of the mystery of the incarnation is that somehow the creator of every place and every home in the universe asked for and was granted a particular home in the womb of Mary of Nazareth.

Mary sings, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” And it does. But God is magnified by more than just her soul. Her life magnifies the Lord through its witness. For as she opens her body in order to provide a home for Emmanuel, she magnifies and multiplies the work of the God whose mission is to lift up the lowly, to fill the hungry with good things, to make a home for the homeless.

Our richest contentment as pilgrim people is not achieved by going home again and finding rest among our families. The smile you see on a grandfather’s face as he scrubs out the roaster is like the smile you’d see on the face of Katie Luther as she bottles up another batch of Wittenberg ale, and like the contented-scared smile that Mary displays in many paintings. All testify to the fact that the magnificent richness of life in Christ will always be found when we magnify and multiply the life and mission of God by providing place, home and rest for others.

Every day Christians are invited to live into Mary’s paradox of being the small place where the maker of all places can dwell. As members of the church of Jesus Christ, we have opened our lives up so that we can be the dwelling place for Jesus.

Jesus lives in us as surely as we live in him. Mary’s “let it be unto me” is our invitation to magnify the Lord by participating in God’s mission. Every time we provide a place, pour a drink, open a door, extend an invitation, ask someone to tell his or her story, make room or provide a home, Mary’s song becomes our song.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, December 25
Titus 2:11–14

I WAS VISITING the traditional site of Good Friday and Easter: the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, an imposing, exotic, heterogeneous amalgam of interconnected buildings in the Old City of Jerusalem. Oversight of the building complex is rationed out to the Greek Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Coptic, Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox communions.

I was immediately surrounded by crosses, altars, mosaics, nooks, grottoes, candles, lampstands, thuribles and icons—and by Pentecost. On any given day one can hear liturgies intoned in Latin, Greek, Armenian, Ethiopian, Syrian or Coptic. Pilgrims and members of travel groups, often dressed in the colors of their nations' flags, filled up the space, speaking, praying, weeping and keening. Some pilgrims knelt to put their hands in the crevice where Jesus' cross was planted, prostrating themselves on and kissing the stone where his body was anointed and wrapped in the shroud. Then they stooped down to enter the grotto where Joseph of Arimathea's tomb was located. I was part of a pious, emotional, ecumenical, holy, chaotic Christian carnival.

In the midst of all of this, a challenging thought came to mind. Is it possible, I wondered, to imagine Jesus, the holy human one, entering this space right now, and looking and being in such a way that every tongue here would spontaneously confess, "Yes! This is he whose death and resurrection took place on this very spot!"? The answer was apparent to me: no.

The Christmas epistle from Titus extols the grace of God that trains and sustains us in Christian living "while we wait for the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." But on that day in Jerusalem I realized that we who wait are a heterogeneous amalgam of communities and communions, and that no manifestation of Jesus could satisfy a plurality of these. Any one manifestation would be too particular to have a chance at being recognized as the savior of the entire cosmos. Yet Jesus had once been in that city! Our lack of agreement and recognition doesn't change the fact that Jesus already looks like Jesus looks.

In Philippians 2, Paul prophesies that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. That I can imagine. The name of Jesus lives on the lips of every Christian pilgrim in Jerusalem and around the world. The name of Jesus does unite us. But the

name is an abstract linguistic marker. As long as the actual Jesus to whom that name refers dwells only in our abstract Christ-ifications, we celebrate Christmas in safety. We are safe from the offensive particularity of the embodiment; each of us can design an acceptable Jesus avatar in our minds. In Alfred Burt's song, some children see Jesus as lily white, some as bronzed and brown, some as almond-eyed and some as black. But Jesus doesn't need children to see him all these different ways: he's been here already! He already *looks like Jesus*. The truth is that most if not all of those children see him "wrong."

Mary didn't give birth to an avatar or a name or an idea. Mary didn't give birth to a host of representative samples of humanity's diversity. Mary gave birth to one human baby whose annoying specificity warns us and protects us, first from worshiping only our favorite icon, and second from worshiping only the cosmic Christ, the eternal Logos or any other philosophical tag in whose inscrutability we can claim Christmas unity. Jesus already and only looks like Jesus.

Incarnation is a scandal because by refusing to look like we imagine him, Jesus *others* us all. If Mary's child of God is

Mary gave birth to one human baby, not to a name or an idea.

male, he is not female; if he's left-handed, he's not right-handed; if he's an endomorph, he's not a mesomorph. Jesus embodied is the inconvenient truth. If we are to enjoy genuine Christmas unity, it will not be in gazing up in bliss at celestial glory but in looking together at that confounding child.

The Jesus that we find on Christmas is a weak, small, improbable baby who grows up to be a despised and rejected outsider—first because he's from Galilee rather than Judea, later because he is scourged and put to a shameful death. No doubt this is why Jesus' version of the good Christian life is a bit grittier. Knowing that we'd never agree to recognize the actual Jesus, God invites us to manifest "the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" by finding him in the faces of the weak, small, improbable, scourged, executed and despised "least of these."

The author is Henry J. Langknecht, associate professor of homiletics and Christian communication at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio.

CC RECOMMENDS



A special Christmas review of noteworthy books, video and music



Theology & spirituality

The Cross and the Lynching Tree

By James H. Cone

Orbis Books, 172 pp., \$28.00



"Black body swinging in the Southern breeze," sang Billie Holiday in "Strange Fruit." Cone sets the Romans' preferred apparatus of torture and death beside the spectacle lynchings of America's shameful past. Against tendencies to both sentimentalize and fetishize the cross, Cone calls for a clear-eyed, reciprocal interpretation of the crucified Christ and "the lynched black body." The past, he reminds us, is not so past: one-third of all young black men are in prison or somewhere in the "system." You can lynch a person without using a rope or a tree.

Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps

By Richard Rohr

St. Anthony Messenger Press, 160 pp., \$15.99 paperback

Spirituality is perhaps an ill-chosen word in this book's subtitle, given that Rohr's characterization of Christianity is (and always has been) relentlessly incarnational. Here his identification of the gospel with the core tenets of Alcoholics Anonymous underscores how redemption comes to us in and through the messes we make of our lives, not despite them. Anyone with first- or even secondhand knowledge of the Twelve Steps can attest to the unsettling challenges they present to safe, respectable, middle-class Christianity: "When the churches forget their own gospel message, the Holy Spirit sneaks in through the ducts and air vents. AA meetings have been very good ductwork, allowing fresh air both in and out of many musty and mildewed churches."

Being about Borders: A Christian Anthropology of Difference

By Michele Saracino

Liturgical Press, 168 pp., \$29.95 paperback

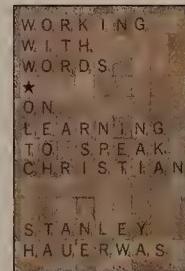
While tough talk on borders is common (and politically expedient) these days—electric fences being one recent proposal—Saracino crosses several disciplinary boundaries in order to steer the conversation in directions that are as surprising as they are hopeful. Claiming that Christians witness to a messiah who "revels in border life" and drawing on traditional and contemporary sources in philosophy and theology, feminist theory and clinical research in the treatment of trauma, *Being about Borders* takes into account the affective dimension of border crossings: the complicated emotions that attend interpersonal, interreligious and international relationships.

Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian

By Stanley Hauerwas

Cascade Books, 322 pp., \$37.00 paperback

Well known for his salty and often incendiary speech, Hauerwas tends to words with a craftsman's care. In truth he has always done this, but this collection of essays, sermons and lectures reveals him to be a humble, patient guide, helping Christians to see and speak truthfully. Hauerwas is a word provocateur, but always in service to the Word that is our life and our hope.



A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good

By Miroslav Volf

Brazos Press, 192 pp., \$21.99

Volf navigates the complexities of Christianity's relationship to culture by charting a course that bypasses the dangers of both "exclusion" and "saturation"—withdrawal and disengagement on the one hand and a toxic mixing of church and state on the other. Especially timely in an election season, when candidates and their partisan

backers routinely exploit religious language for personal gain, Volf calls for "pluralism as a political project." He argues that the faith that enjoins Jews, Muslims and Christians to love their neighbors as themselves—to receive the other not as threat but as blessing—makes religious difference a gift for the common good.

The Devil Wears Nada: Satan Exposed!

By Tripp York

Cascade Books, 164 pp., \$19.00 paperback

Would that more theologians used humor to explicate the finer points (and the thicker ones, too) of Christian doctrine. York's subject matter is ripe for comic treatment, but behind the funny stuff—or rather all the way through it—is a commanding grasp of the always devilish problem of evil. Philosophy, theology, ethics, liturgy and Ann Coulter all make an appearance in this journey to the dark side in which we discover, through York's playful, skillful guidance, that "there is either God or nothingness."

Selected by Debra Dean Murphy, who teaches at West Virginia Wesleyan College.



Creative nonfiction

On Conan Doyle:

Or, The Whole Art of Storytelling

By Michael Dirda

Princeton University Press, 224 pp., \$19.95

There's always something happening on the Sherlock Holmes front, but this season offers a particularly rich conjunction of items. At the top of the list is Michael Dirda's book, which takes the Holmes canon as a point of a departure but deftly encompasses the full sweep of Doyle's life and work. And it's a beautifully made little book as well, a pleasure to hold in one's hands.



In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination

By Margaret Atwood

Nan A. Talese, 272 pp., \$24.95

The novelist Margaret Atwood casts a cool eye on all things Christian. But this disarmingly personal book (which in the Kindle edition includes some of her childhood drawings) will have deep resonance for readers who don't share her skepticism. She shows how science fiction expresses something essential about our peculiar species.

Dante in Love

By A. N. Wilson

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 400 pp., \$35.00

This is an odd book but beguiling nonetheless. Not a straight biography and not literary criticism, it gives us Dante as seen by a gifted biographer and novelist who has come back to faith after a very public turning away some years earlier. You may find yourself skimming the accounts of Florentine politics, but Wilson's wit never slumbers for long.

The Words of Others: From Quotations to Culture

By Gary Saul Morson

Yale University Press, 352 pp., \$30.00

Like many other subjects, the nature of quotation seems pretty straightforward until you begin to think about it. Morson performs a small miracle of exposition. Your understanding of how we use (and misuse) the words of others will be permanently enriched, and Morson's bite-sized sections allow for reading episodically.

Iphigenia in Forest Hills: Anatomy of a Murder Trial

By Janet Malcolm

Yale University Press, 168 pp., \$25.00

Malcolm will soon be 80, but she hasn't lost her vigor as a writer—or her ability to provoke. *Iphigenia*, like the 1959 film *Anatomy of a Murder*, inverts the classic trial narrative in which justice is clearly done and all the seeming contradictions in the evidence are resolved.

Selected by John Wilson, editor of Books & Culture.



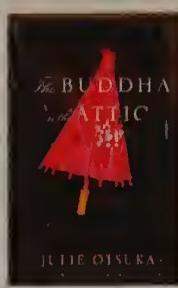
Fiction

The Buddha in the Attic

By Julie Otsuka

Knopf, 144 pp., \$22.00

Otsuka tells the story, in collective voice, of Japanese women who traveled to meet husbands already living in the U.S. in the first part of the 20th century. She writes of their encounters with American culture and how they shaped their dreams and hopes for themselves and their families in difficult and sometimes harrowing circumstances.



The Love of My Youth

By Mary Gordon

Pantheon, 320 pp., \$25.95

Gordon coaxes the past and present to speak both philosophically and kindly through the experience of Adam and Miranda, two people who were young lovers and who reencounter one another after 40 years of separation.

Caleb's Crossing

By Geraldine Brooks

Viking, 320 pp., \$26.95

A young Wampanoag Indian meets a young New England woman. Set in the 17th century, this novel is not a romance but a meditation on education, cultural difference and friendship at a defining moment in American history.

The Coffins of Little Hope

By Timothy Schaffert

Unbridled Books, 272 pp., \$24.95

In a small, dying town in Nebraska, Essie Myles has fine-tuned her understanding of life and death by writing the obituary page for the local newspaper for more than 60 years. When a young girl is reported missing, Essie and the rest of the town go in search of her story. What she

finds is less the truth than the various truths of myth and family legends.

Pigeon English

By Stephen Kelman

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 288 pp., \$24.00

Harri is a boy who has recently immigrated to London from Ghana. When another boy in his neighborhood is murdered, Harri and his friends try to track down the killer, all the while interpreting the strange world in which they find themselves through hilarious misunderstandings and original use of slang. *Pigeon English* is a playful look at language and culture, and a serious consideration of youth and violence.

Selected by Amy Frykholm.



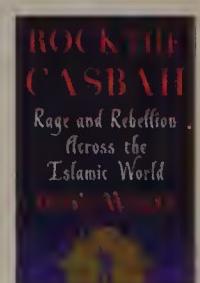
History & current events

Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World

By Robin Wright

Simon & Schuster, 320 pp., \$26.99

The West's myopic preoccupation with the war on terror has kept it from seeing the ferment in the Middle East, says Wright. She gives an up-close account of three movements for change: the revolts against authoritarian regimes given expression in the so-called Arab Spring; the counter-jihad movement against al-Qaeda and the Taliban; and the rebellion against Islamic ideology typified by the Green Revolution in Iran. Whatever emerges from these movements will not necessarily be pro-Western and will most certainly have an Islamic identity. The Middle East's future will be complicated by lack of democratic experience, poverty, access to oil, Iran's nuclear



ambition, Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as sectarian divisions within Islam itself.

We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People

By Peter Van Buren

Metropolitan Books, 288 pp., \$25.00

Van Buren is a foreign service officer who volunteered for a year of "nation building" in Iraq. He discovered gross mismanagement, a profligate waste of resources, a bureaucratic quagmire and a resistance to adjusting to realities on the ground. Programs were never tested with the Iraqis they were meant to serve. The disastrous outcomes would be funny if they weren't so tragic. This is the book the State Department doesn't want you to read, van Buren says, and it has gotten him in trouble with his superiors

Bismarck: A Life

By Jonathan Steinberg

Oxford University Press, 592 pp., \$34.95



Known as the brutal "Iron Chancellor," Bismarck, was one of the most influential leaders in 19th-century Europe. Steinberg's psychological portrait of the man who united Germany shows a very complex and contradictory human being: tyrannical and insecure, charming yet domineering. Bismarck's power grab in the early years was aided by Lutheran Pietists who shared his anti-Semitism and believed the only good Jew was a converted Jew. Other Bismarck biographies have been written, but what is unique about Steinberg's is his effort to give voice to Bismarck's contemporaries—how they perceived and experienced him.

What It Is Like to Go to War

By Karl Marlantes

Atlantic Monthly Press, 224 pp., \$25.00

Marlantes was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford in 1967 when, out of a sense of duty, he volunteered for combat service in

Vietnam and ended up leading a platoon of marines. A year ago Marlantes published a highly regarded fictional work (*Matterhorn*) based on his Vietnam experience. This nonfiction work represents 40 years of reflecting on what combat did to him mentally and spiritually. While he was trained well to kill, he didn't receive training on how to deal with what the war would do to him.

In the Plex: How Google Thinks, Works, and Shapes our Lives

By Steven Levy

Simon & Schuster, 432 pp., \$26.00

Of several books out this year about Google, Levy's is the most enthusiastic and uncritical, but it's still a good introduction to a company that has transformed how we gain access to information. Instead of going to the library we enter the mathematically engineered, advertisement-soaked, profit-driven online environment developed by Google. With its ability to anticipate what we're searching for, Google indeed has the power to shape our lives.

All the Devils Are Here: The Hidden History of the Financial Crisis

By Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera

Portfolio/Penguin, 416 pp., \$17.00 paperback

Comprehending the financial crash of 2008, with its many complex moving parts, may be beyond human capacity, but this book comes close. McLean and Nocera, two of the best business writers around, profile more than a dozen figures who were at the center of the debacle. All of them acted according to the logic of the institutions they served, refusing to believe that they—and so many other smart, successful people—could have gotten it all wrong. The "devils," the authors show, were ordinary ones.

The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century

By Alan Brinkley

Vintage, 576 pp., \$17.00 paperback

Luce founded (with Yale classmate Britt Hadden) *Time* magazine and went on to create *Life*, *Fortune* and a huge

media empire. He was the son of Presbyterian missionaries to China who sought to extend Christian beliefs and the benefits of American life around the globe. In Luce, such evangelical ambition was transposed into a secular key. His passion was for America and the American brand of success. It was Luce who first called the 20th century "the American century." Brinkley, a master of modern U.S. history, makes plain Luce's limitations as well as his genius at articulating and shaping Americans' self-understanding.

Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America

By Richard White

Norton, 660 pp., \$35.00

The building of a transcontinental railroad and the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Summit in Utah constitute one of the mythic stories of the American West. White offers a withering account of the darker realities behind the story. As he tells it, the transcontinental project was fueled by greed, political bribery and massive government subsidies. Railroads of the late 19th century were ill conceived, "bloated, ill managed, heavily indebted, and corrupt"—which didn't stop their owners from amassing enormous personal fortunes.

Selected by Richard A. Kauffman and David Heim



Children's literature

For young adults

Trapped

By Michael Northrop

Scholastic Press, 240 pp., \$17.99

At first, the snow comes in "small flakes, like grains of sugar." By fourth period every student but Scott Weems is

clamoring for a snow day. A sophomore on the Tattawa' High varsity basketball team, Weems doesn't want his game debut canceled. But by dinner time, he and his friends are trapped in their school, facing a fierce nor'easter, and scavenging for food and warmth.

Vietnam: I Pledge Allegiance (Book One)

By Chris Lynch

Scholastic Press, 192 pp., \$16.99

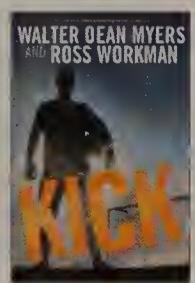
Four friends have pledged to do everything together, whether it is waiting to see a movie until Ivan is ungrounded or skipping the Babe Ruth League after Rudi isn't picked. When Rudi is drafted into the Vietnam War, Beck, Ivan, and Morris enlist in separate branches of the military. Through Morris's narration, readers get a vivid, expansive view of the war.

Kick

By Walter Dean Myers and Ross Workman

HarperTeen, 208 pp., \$16.99

Celebrated author Myers teams with a 16-year-old writer to tell, through alternating voices, the story of Kevin, a young soccer player charged with kidnapping and grand larceny. Myers creates a likable Sergeant Brown, Kevin's case officer. Workman's youthfulness is evident in the figure of Kevin, who feigns toughness. Filled with brisk dialogue and intermittent soccer scenes, the novel presents a boy who will sacrifice his personal image to guard a promise.



Okay for Now

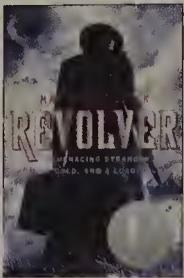
By Gary D. Schmidt

Clarion Books, 368 pp., \$16.99

In 1968, Doug Swieteck (a character introduced in Schmidt's Newbery Honor book *The Wednesday Wars*) is forced to move with his troubled family to upstate New York. There, Doug lives in a world marked by Apollo spaceflights, the Vietnam War and the New York Yankees. In a quest that begins at the local library, Doug discovers Audubon treasures and a host of charming friends.

Revolver
By Marcus Sedgwick
Roaring Brook Press, 240 pp., \$8.99 paperback

Set in the Arctic Circle in 1899 and 1910, this mystery pits young Sig against a sinister stranger. The hulking man arrives at the family cabin where Sig's father is lying on the table, having died after falling through the ice. A Colt revolver is buried in a nearby store-room, but Sig is troubled about using it. And the stranger has come seeking not only vengeance but hidden treasure.



Picture books for young children

Oh, What a Christmas!

By Michael Garland

Scholastic Press, 40 pp., \$16.99

When Santa's reins break and his reindeer fly off without him, he and his sleigh fall safely to earth, landing near a snow-covered barn. Presents tumble to the ground as Santa ponders how he will make his deliveries. Then the barn door creaks open, and cows and pigs and goats and sheep step into the magic of Santa's journey.

Neville

By Norton Juster, illustrated by G. Brian Karas

Schwartz and Wade Books, 32 pp., \$17.99

Nobody asked the boy in the family if he wanted to move. They just told him. Now forced to live in a new home in a strange neighborhood, he has no friends. When his mother suggests he might meet someone if he takes a walk around the block, he shuffles out the door—and lands on a plan that begins with a deep breath.

Cedric and the Dragon
By Elizabeth Raum, illustrated by
Nina Victor Crittenden
Alma Little Books, 32 pp., \$16.95

Little Prince Cedric waited nearly two years before he chose to walk. When he was old enough for school, he found math and reading hard to conquer, and dragon-slaying training was less fun than picking

flowers for his mum. Cedric was good at something; he was a terrific hugger. But how can a prince who hugs fight fearsome dragons?

Me . . . Jane

By Patrick McDonnell

Little, Brown, 40 pp., \$15.99

Jane and her stuffed monkey, Jubilee, live in "a magical world full of joy and wonder." Whether they are climbing beech trees, collecting eggs from the hen house or reading books about Tarzan of the Apes, they dream of living with and helping animals. So no one is surprised when Jane (Goodall) grows up and finds herself in Africa—hugging a real chimpanzee!

A Ball for Daisy

By Chris Raschka

Schwartz and Wade Books, 32 pp., \$16.99

This enchanting wordless book illustrates a sad day for Daisy the Dog after her favorite toy is stolen by another pooch. When the ball is popped and loses its air, Daisy's owner walks her dejected pet home. Inconsolable on her couch, Daisy eventually returns to the scene of the crime where a surprise from another park patron has Daisy rolling along again.

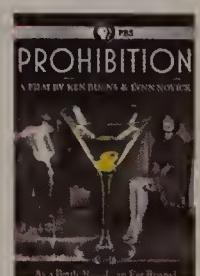
Selected by Nancy Hull, who teaches English at Calvin College.



TV on DVD

Prohibition

PBS

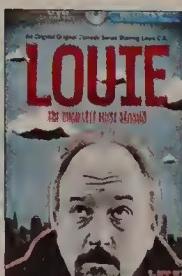


Ken Burns's three-part, five-hour PBS documentary on America's misguided experiment with enforced teetotaling deftly explores the conflicts between rural and urban, native and immigrant, Protestant and Catholic, women and men. It's also swift and lively from

start to finish: compared to some of the filmmaker's other long-form forays into big American subjects, Prohibition goes down as easy as Tennessee whiskey.

Louie (Season One)

FX



Comedian Louis C.K. serves as creator, director, sole writer and star of the gloomy comedy that bears his name. Like his namesake, onscreen Louie is a stand-up comic and devoted single father in New York City. The camera follows him as he works, trades crass jokes with his comedian friends and takes care of his two daughters. It's the darkest, sweetest show about parenting on TV.

The Middle (Season Two)

Warner

Like syndication staple *The King of Queens*, ABC's *The Middle* is a solid, gentle family sitcom that can't get no respect from tastemakers. And in contrast to, say, *Everybody Loves Raymond*—which also starred *The Middle* mom Patricia Heaton—the members of the struggling middle-class Heck family actually seem to like each other. The series isn't edgy or buzzed about, but it's funny and slightly weird—and refreshing in its portrayal of a family that works.

Modern Family (Season Two)

20th Century Fox



Unlike its network neighbor *The Middle*, *Modern Family* gets plenty of critical recognition—and for good reason. The whip-smart sitcom follows three branches of an extended family that is diverse in age, race, sexual orientation and parenting style. The show uses a loose mockumentary style to construct a tight half hour jam-packed with jokes, including plenty of old-fashioned physical comedy. *Modern Family* is what the phrase "fun for the whole family" was created for.

Portlandia (Season One)

Video Service Corp.

A loving send-up of earnest West Coast progressivism at its most self-satisfied, *Portlandia* skewers its subject via sketches that veer into the absurd: a couple so concerned with the provenance of their meal that they abruptly leave the restaurant to visit a farm; a pair of hipsters so desperate to prove their cultural savvy that they just end up shouting "Did you read ___?" "Yes, did you read ___?" at each other over coffee. The IFC show's creators and stars are Fred Armisen, who plays President Obama on *Saturday Night Live*, and Portland musician Carrie Brownstein, whose new band, Wild Flag, is just what the residents of *Portlandia* would be talking about down at the feminist bookstore. Well, that and *Portlandia*.

Teen Mom 2 (Season One)

MTV

Don't be thrown by the *Reefer Madness*-esque title or the fact that *Teen Mom 2* is a reality show produced by MTV. It's also a riveting and respectfully told cautionary tale. Over the course of the season, the producers follow four young mothers as they struggle with motherhood, school and work—and with relationships with their parents and the almost universally feckless fathers of their children. Why do some girls seem destined for stability, while others linger in cycles of irresponsibility and abuse? To its credit, the show doesn't spell out an answer, but it also doesn't shy away from issues of class and character. The series, the second spinoff from the show *16 and Pregnant*, features slightly more extreme story lines than its predecessors—it includes a couple with twins who rush into marriage and then divorce—but it's still worth watching as that rarest of specimens: reality television that makes you cry with, not laugh at, its stars.

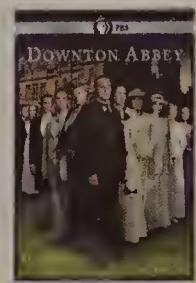
Downton Abbey (Season One)

PBS

This ITV series aired in the States on *Masterpiece Classic*; appropriately enough, it's a masterpiece and an instant classic.

Created and mostly written by *Gosford Park* scribe Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey* takes place in a rambling English mansion at the start of the Great War. One thread of the upstairs-downstairs plot follows the Earl of Grantham, who is noble in both senses of the word, and his three daughters, whose gender prevents them from inheriting the property. Meanwhile, the house's huge staff struggles with its own dramas of work and love. Psychologically complex and beautifully modern, this is costume drama at its best.

Selected by Ruth Graham, a freelance writer in New Hampshire.



Choral Christmas music

Christmas with Cantus

Cantus, \$16.09

I'm partial to Cantus because the group started its musical life at St. Olaf College, where my husband, Tony Holt, taught singing for 20 years. It takes some of the best lesser-known carols and adds to them its own pristine interpretations and arrangements. Check out bass Timothy C. Takach's range on a couple of the Russian arrangements from "The All-Night Vigil."



Sing Noel! A European Christmas Revels

By The Revels
Revels, \$11.99

Early music buffs will rejoice in this collection of medieval and Renaissance music. Not only does it cover Christmas in Spain and France, but it adds some Arabic music to the mix. A lovely blend of voices, including children's.

Carols & Christmas Songs

By Bryn Terfel

Deutsche Grammophon, \$12.90

One of the two CDs in this 2010 release is a beautiful showcase for Bryn Terfel, one of the great baritone voices of our time. Included are favorites: "O Come, All Ye Faithful," "Wexford Carol" and a duet with Bing Crosby on "White Christmas." As a second-generation Welsh woman, I find the second CD—with carols in Welsh—breathtaking. It's every bit as good as hearing Richard Burton read Dylan Thomas.



The Cherry Tree—Songs, Carols & Ballads for Christmas

By Anonymous 4

Harmonia Mundi, \$17.99

The ethereal, sterling, ice-castle sound of Anonymous 4 is well-suited for this collection of medieval carols and Anglo-American spirituals—all inspired by the famous "miracle" carol of the 15th century, "The Cherry Tree."



Our Favorite Carols

By Chanticleer

Chanticleer Records, \$14.99

A collection of Chanticleer's best from "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" to Gustav Holst's beautiful "This Have I Done for My True Love." This is a timeless collection sung to perfection by the Bay Area's favorite singing sons.



The Christmas Story

By Theatre of Voices and Ars Nova

Copenhagen, led by Paul Hillier

Harmonia Mundi, \$18.19

Inspired by the Anglican tradition's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, this

CD presents the Nativity story in song, dialogue and folk carols. A lovely tradition with a twist.

Selected by Lynne Warfel, a host on National Public Radio.



Popular music

The Harrow and the Harvest

By Gillian Welch

Acony, \$9.99

Gillian Welch takes some but not all of her cues from old Nashville and older Appalachia. While a lot of artists matching this description leaven their traditionalism with jazzy complexity or gauzy pop sheen, Welch looks to Neil Young and the Band. This rock edge came to the songwriting fore on *Time (The Revelator)* (2001); the acoustic-duo sound (with longtime collaborator David Rawlings) remained. *The Harrow* pushes this winning formula further, its even timbre melding some of Welch's old-timiest songs with others that barely signify "country" at all. While the recording preserves a good bit of compositional spontaneity, Welch and Rawlings' masterful restraint never falters. A similar restraint infuses Welch's fine rhythm guitar and clawhammer banjo, along with the duo's deadpan close harmony—all of which is deliciously offset by the schooled yet slightly reckless way Rawlings attacks his guitar.

The Head and the Heart

By the Head and the Heart

Sub Pop, \$11.22

This new band's sound has roots in the indie-folk scene, with its moody treatments of simple chord progressions and Americana rhythms. But the larger thread here is classic pop, and *The Head and the Heart* offers the com-



plete package: polished songwriting, ambitious style changes and especially tight harmonies—the three singers, unmemorable by themselves, blend their voices expertly and joyfully. The band shows some instrumental chops as well, particularly Kenny Hensley. (It's always great to hear a young band with a piano player who isn't just a guitarist who dabbles.) Hensley's tasty playing drives a lot of the band's earthy yet breezy sound. It's the feel-good record of the year.

Say Goodbye

By Liz Janes

Asthmatic Kitty, \$14.35

Liz Janes calls this a soul album, but it's no straight-ahead salute to Memphis. Still, soul is as good a word as any for this quiet, strange but above all groovy little record. A lot of the pleasure comes from Janes's rhythmically intense singing—a couple of the songs include long, sparse intros on which you don't need a rhythm section to feel the beat. When the drums and upright bass do show up, they move freely from subdued to jazzy to scattershot. The album also features much outside-the-box electric piano, along with the occasional surprise drop-in by a classic soul horn line. At a couple points, the music strains under the weight of Janes's clumsily theological lyrics. Still, *Say Goodbye* is one of the most pleasantly unusual records to come out in some time.

Mockingbird Time

By the Jayhawks

Rounder, \$13.30

Mark Olson is a little bit folk-country; Gary Louris is a little bit '70s rock 'n' roll. The two singer-songwriters have always brought out the best in each other, and this year they got the band back together—the Jayhawks lineup that made the best record of the alt-country '90s, *Tomorrow the Green Grass*. "Our goal is to make the best Jayhawks album that's ever been done," said Louris. At this they inevitably fail—the material here is strong, but little of it gets within a

country-rock mile of the dark yet raucous perfection of *Green Grass*. Still, the return of Olson (and piano player/third vocalist Karen Grotberg) means the sweet harmonies are back, as are the gritty edges that eluded the band in Olson's absence. Meanwhile, Louris's emphasis on acoustic work brings a welcome mellowness to his guitar heroics.

Helplessness Blues

By Fleet Foxes
Sub Pop, \$9.99



Fleet Foxes' self-titled 2008 debut created something fresh and mysterious out of familiar American tropes: Celtic-laced tunes, full-throated harmony, formalist songwriting that's equal parts Pete Seeger and Brian Wilson, boatloads of reverb. On *Helplessness*

Blues, the scruffy young band preserves all this but tones it down a tad (the big-harmony choruses are a bit fewer and farther between), leaving space to expand the palette. The melodic vocabulary is broader, digging into multiple folk musics domestic and foreign. And the classic pop reference points are more confident, more playful and more richly intertwined with the folk material. In other words, there's a hefty dose of early Paul Simon here, which Fleet Foxes makes delightfully its own. It's a terrific sophomore effort, solidifying hopes for years of great music from this band.

Bad As Me

By Tom Waits
Anti, \$11.76

Since *Swordfishtrombones* (1983), each studio record from Tom Waits has been a major aural event, a circus of left-field arrangement and production. If his

tracks are sometimes polarizing, they've got nothing on the voice he lays over them—fans compare it to Howlin' Wolf, detractors to Cookie Monster. Waits's first proper record in seven years finds him in strong voice and at the top of his sonic game; it's also long on succinctly crafted tracks and short on experimental meanderings. Perhaps a record this accessible will reveal to Waits skeptics what the rest of us know: behind the clinks and clangs and the carnival barking is a songwriter on the shortlist for best alive. Most versatile, too—one minute he's hitting blues rock heavy; the next he's gone pre-war pop, with every shred of Berlin's emotion, Porter's wit and Weill's macabre edge.

Selected by Steve Thorngate.



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North Carolina churches fight for integrated schools

Defending diversity

by Jesse James DeConto

YEARS BEFORE there was a National Council of Churches or a World Council of Churches, and decades before *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* mandated that public schools be integrated, the North Carolina Council of Churches was formed specifically to fight for integrated schools.

"It was originally formed by a small group of white pastors who wanted to integrate in North Carolina in 1935, which is pretty astounding," says David LaMotte, a consultant on social justice with the North Carolina council. "They were ahead of the curve."

Three-quarters of a century later, the council had to mobilize again for school integration in Raleigh, the state capital, home to nation's 18th-largest school district. In the fall of 2009, four newly elected Republican members on the nine-member Wake County Board of Education created a five-person majority in favor of dismantling the Raleigh area's busing-for-diversity program, a model renowned not only in North Carolina but across the nation. With support from suburban parents, the board dropped the goal of achieving socioeconomic balance in school assignments in favor of a neighborhood schools policy. Kids could attend in their own (more homogeneous) communities rather than be bused to schools with a mix of rich and poor, whites and minorities.

"The tragedy is [that] our neighborhoods still aren't integrated, so if our schools are neighborhood schools, they're not integrated schools," said LaMotte.

Mennonite pastor Duane Beck agrees. "The school issue really reflects the way our population centers have grown in our county. It's not just a school issue; it's a real systemic, community-wide issue. Neighborhoods that are segregated socioeconomically create the problem."

Beck and LaMotte have been working with William Barber, president of the North Carolina office of the NAACP and a Disciples of Christ pastor in nearby Goldsboro. Barber puts the busing issue in historical context. "Busing was the only way to get folk to comply with *Brown*, because they fought the law, and they wouldn't comply." This fall, two years after Barber started a movement to preserve diversity in schools, Democrats won back a majority on the school board—but not before the Republicans had altered the district's policy and replaced its pro-diversity superintendent. The movement still has its work cut out for it with the new superintendent and in crafting another revision to the school-assignment policy.

Though *Brown* required racial integration of schools nearly six decades ago, a series of federal court decisions in the past 20

years has disallowed the use of race as a factor in school assignments. Wake County responded in 2000 by using socioeconomic factors, not race, to balance school enrollments. Wake County's heralded school-assignment policy was based on students' eligibility for a subsidized lunch program. The number of eligible students was limited to 40 percent at any one school. Because of the correlation between minority status and economic status, the policy had the effect of integrating by race. In the last school year, only a handful of Wake County's 140 schools topped 60 percent in African-American population; most were near 25 percent, which is the average for the district as a whole.

"Separate is always unequal," said William Barber.

By comparison, schools across the nation remain highly segregated. In the 2006-2007 school year, according to an analysis by the Pew Hispanic Center, the typical American white student attended a school that was 77 percent white, while the typical black or Hispanic student attended a school where more than half of the student body matched his or her race or ethnicity. Even more segregated than the average were suburban districts, where typical black and Hispanic students attended schools that were 65 to 70 percent minority, and city districts, where they attended schools that were 80 percent minority. A 2009 report from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA showed that about 40 percent of black and Latino students across the nation attend schools where at least 90 percent of students are nonwhite. The typical black or Latino student attends a school where nearly 60 percent of the students are low income, according to the study's author Gary Orfield.

"Separate is always unequal," said Barber. "When you divide, it is only for the purpose to deprive."

Experts agree that segregation has an impact on learning. According to data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a standardized test used across the nation, low-income students attending more affluent schools scored almost two years ahead of low-income students in high-poverty schools. (Education

Jesse James DeConto is a writer in Durham, North Carolina.



scholar Richard Kahlenberg reported this data in *American Prospect* magazine.) In June, the U.S. Department of Education reported that nationwide, for the 2009-2010 school year, inexperienced teachers were twice as likely to work in mostly African-American schools as in mostly white schools.

Although Wake County is an urban area with pockets of poverty, its graduation rates have been above the state average for the past decade. In 2007 *Education Week* magazine studied graduation rates and found that Wake County, with a graduation rate of 64 percent, ranked 17th out of the nation's 50 largest school districts. African-American students in Wake County schools have consistently scored higher than their state peers on end-of-grade tests, according to the N.C. School Report Cards.

After successfully narrowing the racial achievement gap in the 1990s, however, Wake County since 2001 has seen the gap between African-American and white students widen. The percentage of students passing end-of-grade reading and math

A school diversity policy comes under attack.

tests has declined for both groups and for the overall student population across the state. Yet Wake County's scores for black students remain above the state average for African Americans.

Part of the success in Wake County, says LaMotte, is that "there were no schools dominated by [students] who were failing. Study after study indicates that integration is key to excellence in education."

Barber points out that an amendment to the state constitution during Reconstruction and the court ruling in *Brown* both promised integrated schools, but "it wasn't until August 30, 1971, that Wake County began modest desegregation. That was only after the moral efforts of the church and the legal efforts of the civil rights community [came] together."

The term *neighborhood schools* has been part of the segregationist rhetoric in each era of the struggle, Barber contends. "That's a code word, and they know it's a code word. It has a deep psychic impact on the American consciousness," he said.

"The reason we fight so hard is because we know the history, and we know how hard we had to fight. In Wake County, we're trying to hold on to success."

Under Barber's leadership, the movement to save Wake County's school diversity policy gained momentum. Early in February 2010 Superintendent Del Burns resigned in protest of the board's plan, and later that month the NAACP in North Carolina made Wake County schools the key issue in its annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HK on J) rally, which brings together faith communities and progressive activists to address social justice issues ranging from universal health care to collective bargaining rights.

In June Barber and historian and author Tim Tyson, along with two other activists, were arrested at a sit-in at a school board meeting. Months later, the board hired Anthony Tata to replace Burns as superintendent. Meanwhile, the protests began to attract national attention.

The North Carolina Council of Churches, the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina and the North Carolina Methodist Conference all passed resolutions in favor of mandating school diversity. A month after Barber and Tyson were arrested at the June school board meeting, clergy helped to rally a thousand people for a march through Raleigh that ended with 19 arrested for disrupting another school board meeting. In addition, church members came out in force for the HK on J rallies in 2010 and 2011. National NAACP president Ben Jealous appeared at the HK on J rally in February 2011 and compared the plan for neighborhood schools to the old "separate but equal" doctrine struck down in *Brown*.

The accrediting agency for Wake County schools, AdvancED, had put the Republican-led school board on accreditation-warned status, giving them until March 2012 to correct the climate of mistrust brought on by the board's "premeditated" act which had destabilized the school system. The district remains under investigation by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, Orfield called the threat to Wake County's school diversity "a shame," joining many other educators who regard Wake County schools as one of the nation's most successful efforts at achieving racial and economic diversity.

Tata created a compromise policy to provide some choice

INTRODUCING

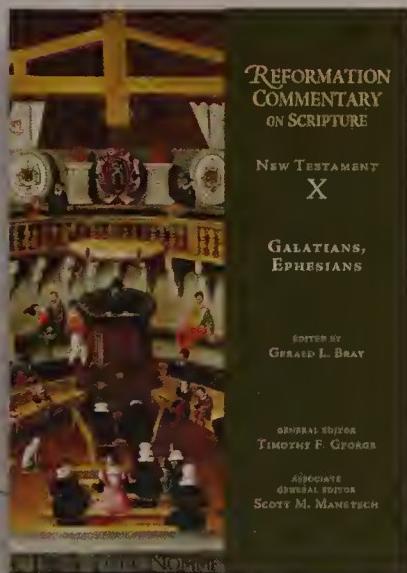
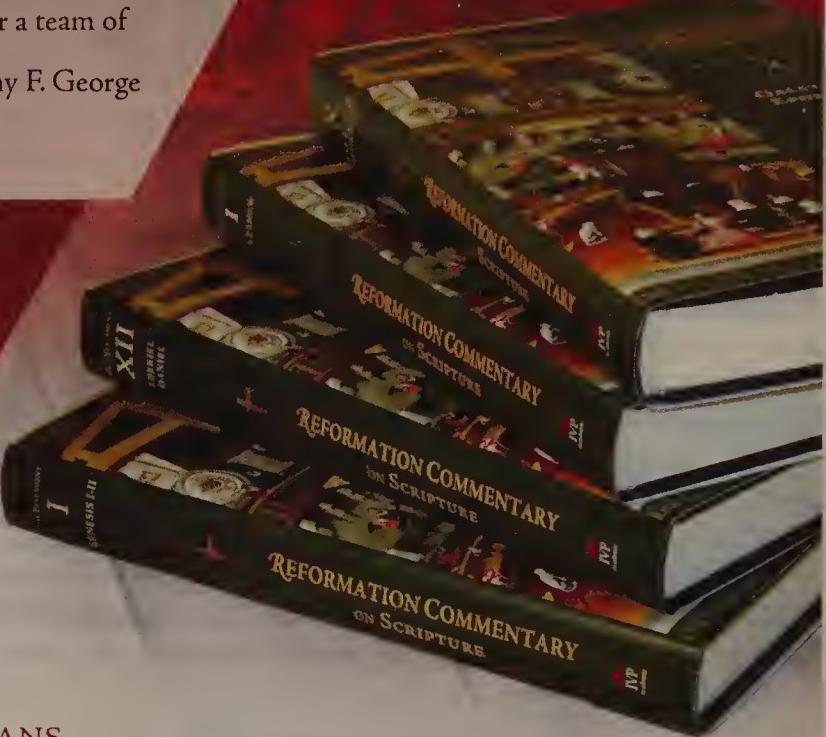
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and limit the length of daily bus rides. In October, the board approved Tata's plan to offer families a choice from a list of nearby schools while maintaining busing for students who want to remain in their current schools.

It remains to be seen whether this plan will be implemented. In October, Republican school board chairman Ron Margiotta was replaced by Democratic challenger Susan Evans for a two-year term. In November, incumbent Democrat Kevin Hill held off Republican challenger Heather Losurdo in a hotly contested runoff that attracted more than \$500,000 in campaign spending, most of it not by the candidates themselves but by partisan groups interested in the national impact of the outcome in Raleigh.

The pro-diversity movement led to Tata's compromise policy, Margiotta's ousting and the Democrats' regaining power. Although socioeconomic diversity has been at least temporarily taken out of school-assignment decisions, Tata's plan could still preserve a level of diversity. "It certainly relieved a lot of anxiety and pressure to have the superintendent move in and take a pretty even-handed leadership role," said Beck. "I thought he . . . was making a good effort to bring more people to the table."

Barber hopes the recent election results will yield a recovery of the diversity policy. "You won't find any urban district more successful with diversity and achievement," Barber said. "We believe Wake was attacked because of its success. How is any plan going to be better than the plan that has already been nationally recognized?"

Many suburban parents don't want their kids taking long bus rides to schools far from their homes. Other parents think exposure to different races and classes of people is worth the longer commute. The divide cuts across many churches and communities. Mainline pastors find their congregations divided on the issue. Beck noted that some members of the Raleigh clergy group, Congregations for Social Justice, couldn't back the diversity cause.

"Leaders of congregations were saying, 'People in our churches are divided, and so we really can't, as leaders of the church, step out to say we are representing our church here for this issue,'" said Beck.



Disobedience for racial justice

William Barber has a way of getting people arrested. Over the past five years as president of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, Barber has revitalized the organization and risen to prominence as a civil rights leader. He was a speaker at the NAACP's annual meeting in Los Angeles this past summer, and his fight against resegregation in North Carolina schools has made national headlines.

Since he took charge of the NAACP in North Carolina, he's been inspiring followers—black and white—to engage in acts of civil disobedience.

Barber himself was arrested in 2010 at a meeting of the Wake County School Board, where a newly elected majority had been working to eliminate the school district's socioeconomic diversity policy. In May 2011 he was arrested again along with six other protesters after being charged with disorderly conduct at a session of the North Carolina General Assembly. Barber was in the gallery of the assembly shouting support for the Racial Justice Act, public education funding, unemployment benefits, several voting rights initiatives, funding for the disabled, public health clinics and indigent legal aid.

Among those arrested with Barber was David LaMotte, a consultant on peace and justice for the North Carolina Council of Churches. "I'm not in the habit of getting arrested. That's the first time I've ever taken that stand," said LaMotte. "It's really hard to listen to [Barber] speak and not be moved. Some people give information but don't invite you to care, some move you but don't give information to act. He really does both, and that's a rare treasure."

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, who has also engaged in acts of civil disobedience, met Barber in the summer of 1997 at a conference for aspiring young politicians sponsored by Governor Jim Hunt, who had appointed Barber head of the state's Human Relations Commission. The meeting changed the direction of Wilson-Hartgrove's life. He spent the next fall as a page for Senator Strom Thurmond but then heard a call to live simply and work for social justice.

"I remember being attracted to the power of his ministry as a different kind of power," said Wilson-Hartgrove. "It struck me as the power of the Holy Spirit."

Barber grew up as a preacher's kid in eastern North Carolina. His father, William Barber Sr., was one of the first black science teachers and his mother the first black secretary in the integrated Washington County public schools. Growing up, Barber watched his father organize against police brutality and saw his mother give free piano lessons.

Barber believes that his parents felt they had an obligation not to escape their community but to help it.

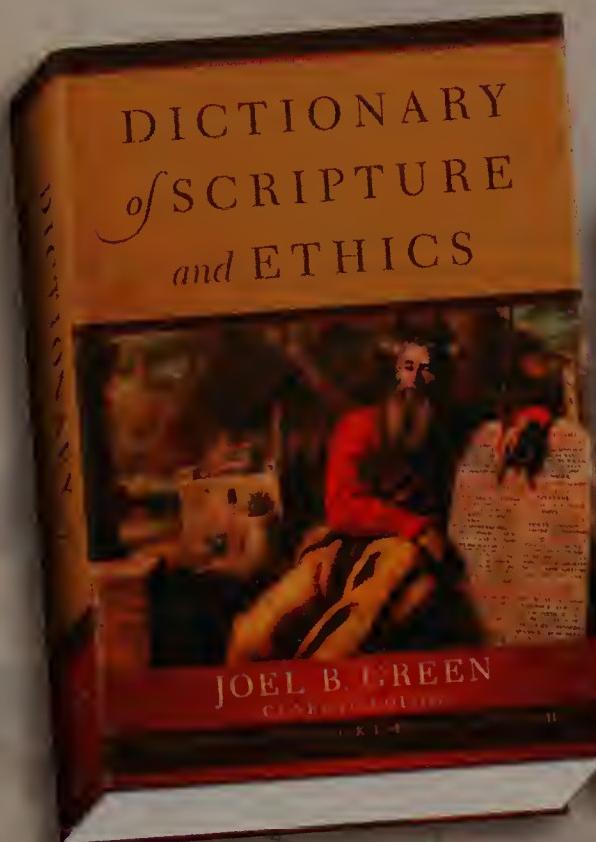
"My parents made a faithful decision," he said. "It was a part of their sacrificial commitment to the cause of Christ. They did that with the hope that things would get better. I don't know how to be a Christian without a deep commitment to justice."

Barber recalls guarding the back door of his uncle's house with a shotgun after the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in the front yard.

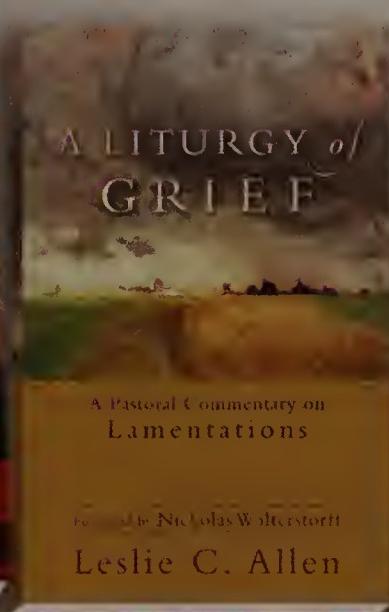
Despite a chronic back problem that leaves his massive frame hunched and makes standing difficult, Barber works in the trenches for social justice. In his hometown of Goldsboro, Barber's Rebuilding Broken Places Community Development Corporation has developed low-income housing, affordable child-care and computer training for adults.

"It's hard for me to argue against diversity when I'm the result of it," he said. "When they want to defund public education, I take it personally. You're actually desecrating the sacrifices of black and whites who worked hard and literally gave their lives to move us forward." —JJD

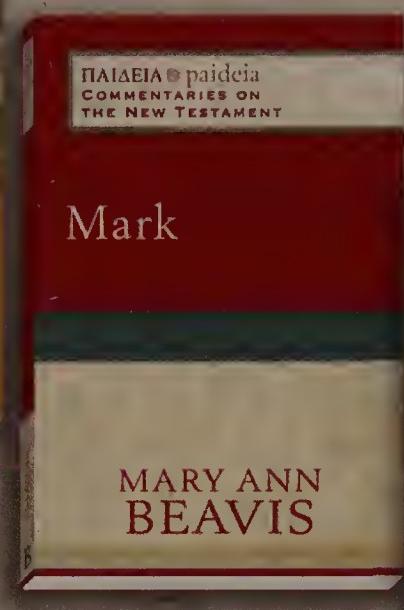
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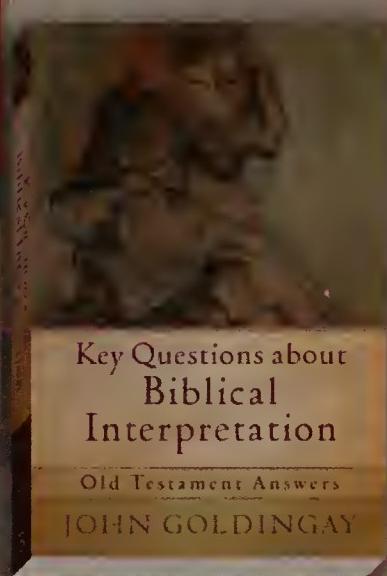


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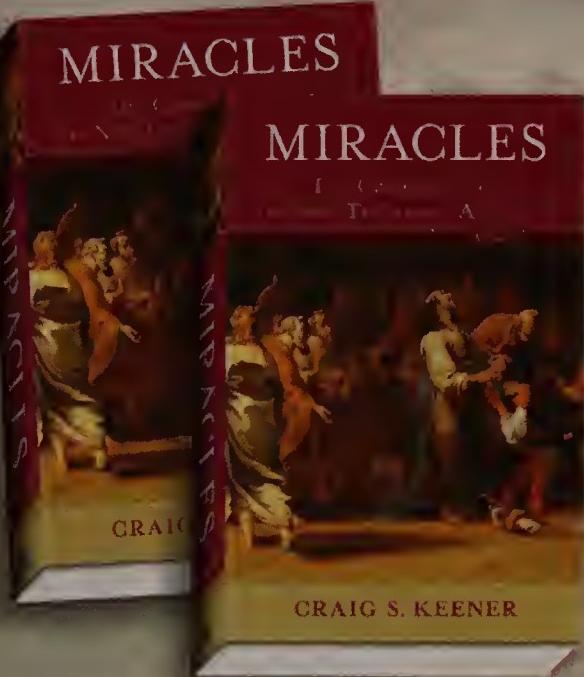


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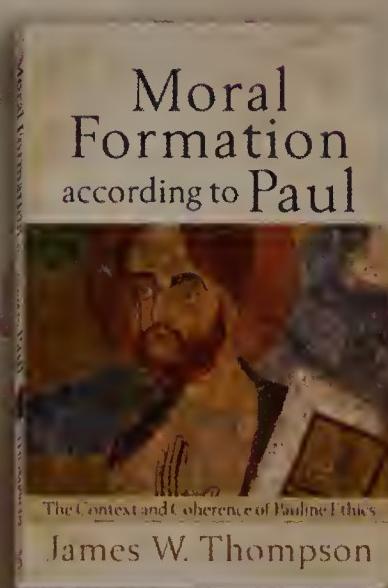
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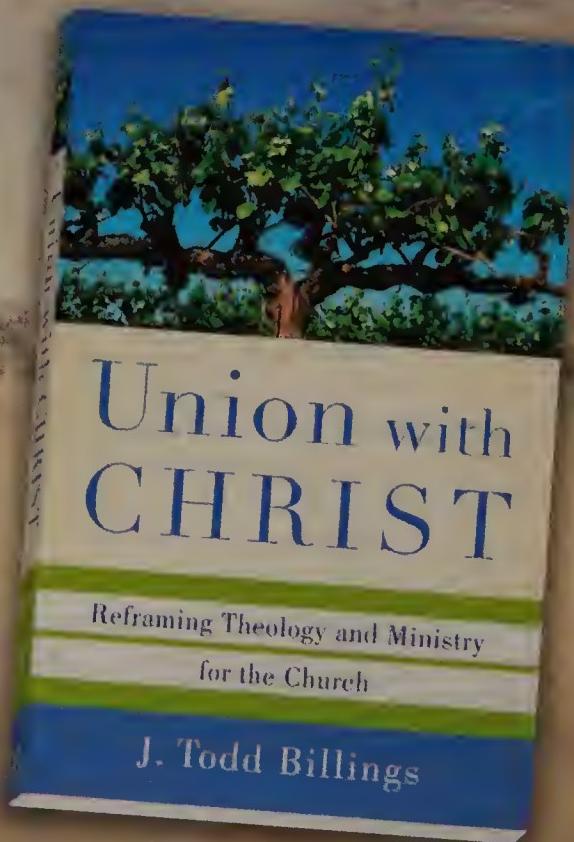
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"Members of churches were caught in the crossfire, so to speak, or maybe they were shooting."

The 10,000-member St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church helped turn that crossfire into a conversation. Director of pastoral ministries Trevor Thompson organized a series of dialogues among citizens' groups, school leaders, activists and journalists.

"This was the first time many parishioners were able to hear both sides without yelling at each other," said Thompson. "It's hard not to think [backing away from busing] is a bad move for the school board if you think about how this is affecting the voiceless among us." But he recognized that giving parents choice "could be supported by Catholic social teaching as well."

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a Christian author and one of the leaders of the New Monasticism movement, has supported the busing program, but he found himself having to explain why following the release of his book *The Wisdom of Stability*, in the spring of 2010, just as the fight over school busing was heating up. In his book, Wilson-Hartgrove calls on Christians to stay rooted in their neighborhoods. So it seemed odd to some that he would support busing.

"It seems like a very community-minded idea that schools would be more neighborhood based," he said. But he asserts that the issue gets more complicated when you look closely at neighborhoods.

Wilson-Hartgrove, who is white, made a conscious decision to live in the historically black Walltown neighborhood of Durham, North Carolina, after he graduated from Duke Divinity School eight years ago. Neighborhoods, he said, suffer from long-term impacts of segregation: poverty, crime and institutional racism. The Republican school board majority in Wake County was trying to do "exactly the same thing white folks tried to do 50 years ago," he said. "You certainly can't legislate love, but you can legislate against the caste system, which isn't going to make everybody the same but is going to create a different set of possibilities." Wilson-Hartgrove notes that suburbanites who have relocated from other parts of the country and who backed the new school board don't understand the racial history of the area.

At St. Francis, however, Thompson sees some relocated and upper-middle-class parishioners supporting the busing program because they believe integration is in line with Catholic social teaching. LaMotte,

of the North Carolina Council of Churches, said the biggest issue among white Christians isn't disagreement over the issue but complacency. More Christians should have been paying attention when the Republican bloc was elected to the school board.

"In order to be faithful to what we're commanded to do in the New Testament, we need to show up a bit more," LaMotte said. "Some churches have really shown up and been incredibly present and involved in this struggle. Others have been less so, and some not at all."

"The church has to be fundamentally in the front on this," said Barber. "It's every generation's responsibility to hold the line."**CC**

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What is pastoral ministry like these days, and how is it being shaped in new ways? The CENTURY talked to pastors about the challenges and surprises of their early years in ministry. This interview is the fourth in a series.

MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Entrepreneurial idealism

Carol Howard Merritt
Washington, D.C.

*Carol Howard Merritt, a graduate of Austin Theological Seminary, serves as associate pastor at Western Presbyterian Church in downtown Washington, D.C. The author of *Tribal Church* and *Reframing Hope*, Merritt cohosts *God Complex Radio* and moderates a national PCUSA committee on the nature of the church in the 21st century. She blogs at *Tribal Church*, which is hosted by the CENTURY.*

What's been the most surprising thing about being in ministry?

The whole art of preaching still surprises me. It amazes me that people sit and listen to what I have to say on a regular and persistent basis. I do a lot of public speaking, and I'm never nervous about it. But when I preach in my own congregation, I still feel a bit tense—even after 13 years of delivering sermons. I'm aware of the weight of preaching, of proclamation.

I have so many hopes for those moments. I long for beauty and artistry in my writing. I want the words to be meaningful, inspiring and relevant. And more than anything else, I long for that palpable sense of God's presence. I expected that the gravitas of preaching would have worn off by now, but it hasn't.

Do you find that listeners receive you differently as a preacher than in your other speaking engagements? Or is the difference in your own sense of the context?

Both. And the difference isn't that there is more rever-



ence or respect in a preaching context; it's that I have a deeper relationship with the listeners. When I speak about church growth or ministering with a new generation, the response is about what sort of work people are doing. When I preach, it evokes stories about people's lives. I hear about the pain, heartache, struggles and elation through which they are working. I think there's more intimacy in preaching, whether or not you're wrapped up in the daily life of the congregation.

What reading has shaped your understanding of ministry?

I read Serene Jones's *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* a while back, and it has stayed with me. It's haunting me; it's like a puzzle that I can't quite figure out. How can religion be such a source of both pain and healing? I try to keep up with public conversations about this—I often hear pain in the voices of the New Atheist movement. And in my office I frequently meet with people who have been wounded by religion. I'm fascinated by the question—it's the focus of my third book.

How have pastors and others with more experience been helpful? Or unhelpful?

A number of pastors have taken me under their wing and given me advice. They have dropped everything so that they could stop and grab a cup of coffee with me and help me

sort through the difficult dynamics that come with leading a congregation.

I grieve over the fact that none of those pastors have been women. I don't know why it is, but the women I respect always seem too busy to engage in mentoring. Perhaps it is because most women stay in entry-level positions, and so few of them make it to the next step on a career trajectory. On numerous occasions I have intentionally reached out to women in the hope that they would mentor me, and I could not get them to respond. It's not that they were rude; they were just too busy.

I worry that women have not viewed networking and helping each other out as a priority in our professional lives. Now that I have some years under my belt, I'm finding that women are less likely than men to reach out to me to be mentored as well. Learning how to ask for, offer and receive help is a vital skill that we will need to nurture in order for women to flourish in this profession. In my experience, women establish wonderful networks to be friendly together, but we are not as good at teaching each other how to excel.

Are there other reasons for this that you've identified besides the fact that more women stay in entry-level positions?

When I first started in ministry, I read a business book called *Hardball for Women*, by Pat Heim. Heim contends that at least until Title IX took effect, girls were socialized to play games as equals, not competitors. We played house or dolls; boys played baseball and soccer. As a result, women feel most comfortable as equals, while men like to play hardball.

There's lots to critique in Heim's argument, but it is a helpful way of understanding certain dynamics among women. It

"I wish seminary had taught me about websites and branding."

answers many of the questions that puzzle women ministers: Why was the only person who voted against hiring me a woman? Why is a woman fighting my pay raise? Why is there such a robust "old boy" network, while women have a difficult time mentoring, being mentored and promoting one another? Women like to see themselves as equals, and this helps us in many ways—but sometimes it means that when a woman begins to rise in her career, we like to take her down a notch.

It also could be that women don't know how to network or ask for help; we have not been taught those particular skills. I am learning a great deal from the men I work with, and I often wonder, "Why didn't I do that?" Often I don't ask for help because I'm afraid of rejection. I'm worried that someone will laugh at me for even thinking that I could be on a certain career path—not only because of low self-esteem on my part, but because people have actually responded this way. After receiving this reaction a few times, I learned to do things quietly and not ask for help too much.

What does being a leader mean? Has your understanding evolved?

I grew up as a conservative Southern Baptist who was taught that women should not speak in church. So my personal understanding of leadership has evolved rapidly and greatly.



Has your understanding changed in other ways along with the question of who gets to be a leader?

I used to respond a great deal to my congregation, readers, supporters and critics. But I did so in an unhealthy way. I needed the praise too much; I would let complaints paralyze me. I would shy away from a topic if anyone disagreed with me about it. Or I would allow the one blaring voice of protest to drown out the 99 nods of agreement.

Now I realize that my job as a leader is not to make everyone happy, and I should not be relying on my job to garner love. I have become more attuned to listening to God, listening to the body, realizing my own vision and moving forward. Of course, when someone has a complaint or fights movement in church, I spend time with them and hear them out. But negative reactions play a much healthier role in my work than they used to.

What does your denominational affiliation mean to you and your parishioners?

Presbyterianism is where I understood grace for the first time. My denomination has formed me, educated me and encouraged me. I owe everything to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Still, I am happy that denominational affiliation is not as important in our society as it once was. It was difficult for me to leave my conservative Southern Baptist roots, but the fact that our society supports religious fluidity made it slightly easier.

At a recent new member class, around the table were people from a variety of backgrounds—Presbyterian, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Shinto, agnostic or metaphysical. Most of Western's parishioners did not come to the church because it is Presbyterian. They came for the sermons, the social justice work or the music. To them, being Presbyterian is not as important as the local church.

What would you be if you weren't a minister?

I would be an artist, a writer and an entrepreneur. But I like to think that I have incorporated those interests into my ministry.

Where do you go for collegiality, inspiration and renewal?

I have particular spiritual practices for renewal, especially walking meditation. Most of my inspiration and collegiality come from online sources. I'm inspired by reading. I look through magazines and journals online; I download books from the Internet, often on the basis of recommendations from blogs and Twitter. I study articles when other people tweet about them. Even when I do subscribe to the print edition of a magazine, I find that I want to peruse it on the bus, at the coffeehouse or at home—and when I reach for the magazine, I realize that I left it at the office. So I tend to scan through mag-

azines on my computer or iPad. I listen to podcasts. I find that they make housework a lot more interesting.

Say more about what you find appealing about Twitter.

I use Twitter in a couple of ways. It's a news stream for me. Lately I've been intrigued by Andy Carvin's Twitter feed (@acarvin). He's an analyst at NPR, and he seems to be shaping journalism in a new way. He has carefully streamed the voices of people in the Arab world to give an on-the-ground account of the recent uprisings. He is a sort of filter, using Twitter to report and verify, and it's fascinating to watch the stories emerge instantly. I grew up with Andy, so I suppose that makes what he's doing even more interesting, but it reminds me how this medium that so many people mock ("Why do I care what you had for breakfast? What can you say in 140 characters?") is making a great impact on how we understand the world.

As a pastor, I use Twitter to resource my ministry. Blogs and Twitter are the main ways that I learn about new curriculum, religious news, new research and a variety of publications. When I have a question, I ask people on Twitter—and I get immediate responses from highly regarded sources. It has become invaluable.

I also go online for collegiality. I began to understand the power of community that forms on Twitter when my father was facing a life-threatening surgery. I tweeted about it and

received a flood of messages from people all over the world, saying they were praying for me and my dad. I can't quite communicate how comforting that was.

This can be a very lonely profession. We might move every two to three years. We can often feel separate from the social groups that surround us. So it's nice to have a community that is not bound by location. It's not all positive, of course. People

"I go online for collegiality."

pick fights, overshare and become petty. But for the most part, I'm thankful for a medium that has deepened my face-to-face interactions and allowed me to stay in contact with people on a daily basis.

On the basis of your ministry experience so far, how would you want to change—or what would you want to add to—your seminary curriculum?

Not enough seminary professors have ever been pastors, so a lot of what they tell their students they ought to be doing in the parish is completely unrealistic. I don't know one pastor who in sermon preparation translates the biblical passage from the original language and goes through all the steps of the hermeneutical process. We'd love to, but our congregations would be frustrated if we spent that much of our workweek studying. Any preacher who has spent more than a year in a parish knows that there just aren't enough hours in the day to do this, but somehow our seminaries haven't figured it out.

I wish I had had an evangelism course that taught us how to access and read demographic data and imagine ministries that could reach out to our surrounding areas. I wish someone would have taught us what should be on a good church website, the basics of design, how to use social media and how to post our sermons as podcasts. I should have learned the basics of branding. (I know that sounds crass, but it would have been extremely helpful.)

I never learned how to ask for money. Many seminaries are very good at building up a donor base, but they never teach their students how to do it. I have learned a ton from my friends who work in nonprofit management. They were taught how to fund-raise. Why weren't we? Do seminaries not realize that it's a huge part of our job? I know that we are supposed to build a sense of stewardship into our preaching and teaching. I realize that we understand good stewardship as

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a natural fruit that grows up from the Christian life. But sometimes the boiler busts, and we need to make the ask. Fast. How do we do it?

In the years to come, church planting is likely be the most important subject that seminaries could teach. Much of my education was geared toward how to keep the 70-year-olds in the pews happy. And I have cherished ministering in that context. But the church is changing rapidly, and our education will need to change as well.

Why do you think church planting will be the most important subject?

More than 70 percent of PCUSA congregations have fewer than 100 members, and the average age of the members is over 60. These churches can keep going for a long time, but most of them will not be able to afford a full-time pastor. They are sharing pastors, hiring lay preachers or going with pulpit supply. And because of the age of the congregants, this probably will not continue to be a sustainable model.

I don't see this state of affairs as the death of the mainline. Far from it: I am thrilled about the possibilities that this presents. Of course, for a church to come to the end of its life cycle is painful, and I don't want to downplay the difficulty of closing a church. But congregations often leave a legacy: property or money that can be used for planting new churches.

A person preparing for the ministry today is likely walking into a denomination in which most ministers will be creating their own jobs. It's an extremely exciting time. When I encourage people to enter seminary, I point out that whatever church they will be serving may well be one that they will also be planting.

What developments would you like to see in your congregation's mission? In the wider church's?

I'm fascinated by cultural and generational shifts. I love the idealism and prophetic focus that baby boomers bring to ministry. I get excited when I think about how our churches and denominations could take that boomer idealism, let go of a bit of power and begin to support Generation X. What would happen if we coupled that idealism with the pragmatism and entrepreneurial spirit of my generation? What if the church unleashed us to plant churches and to use our technological savvy to reach out?

Along with being very large, the millennial generation is generally community-minded and social-justice-oriented. Many millennials are not interested in church, but we could focus on reaching out and working with them. We could embrace their passion for justice and learn from them how to build networks of community.

All of this excites me as I think of the larger church and as I work with these shifts on a local level.



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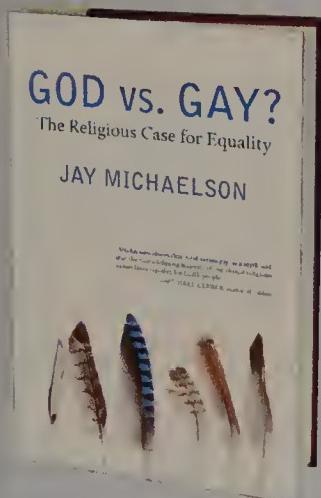
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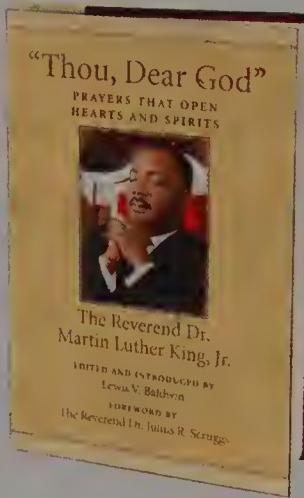
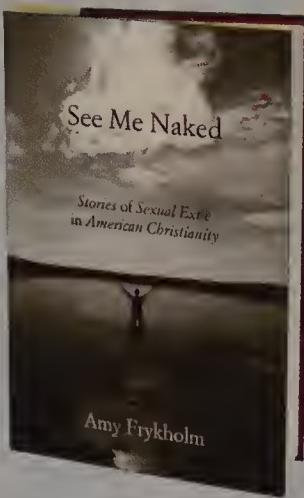
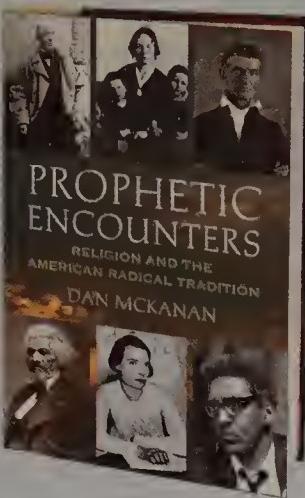
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by M. Craig Barnes

Person of the book

MY BIBLE NEEDS to go to a nursing home. The gold on the edges of the pages has faded to dingy yellow, the leather cover has a shiny worn look, and the embossed words on the binding are almost invisible. I smile when I remember that this is the “New” Revised Standard Version.

I bought this Bible 25 years ago at the bookstore at my graduate school in Chicago. It has traveled with me almost every day in a book bag, along with my church directory, planning calendar, seminary students’ papers and a new novel, all jumbled together. It accompanied me on mission trips through four continents, sat on countless podiums, lecterns and pulpits, and stayed up late with me Saturday nights when I was struggling to find a sermon worth preaching.

There is cellophane tape over many of its torn pages, which I assume is a testimony to my favorite passages. (Why do only Bibles use this tissue-thin paper?) Many of the verses are underlined, some pages are dog-eared—and alongside Psalm 42 there’s a notation I made in grad school; it claims that the psalm was sung at the baptism of St. Augustine in 387. I don’t always remember a chapter-and-verse citation, but I usually remember where that verse can be found on a page of this old Bible. When the Daily Common Lectionary leads me to the last pages of Revelation, I grimace because I no longer have those pages—they were lost about ten years ago along with the maps that traced the missionary journeys of St. Paul.

I should get another copy, but I can’t bring myself to put this old book on the shelf. The older my Bible becomes, the deeper it travels into my heart. That’s not because there haven’t been new suitors. One of the strange ironies of being a pastor is that parishioners keep giving me Bibles as Christmas presents. But those new Bibles are on my shelf, while the tattered one continues to find its place in the book bag I tote around every day.

I have been a Presbyterian pastor for 30 years, but I grew up as the son of a fundamentalist preacher who used to wave his Bible in front of his congregation. During those formative years I must have developed a sense that the book was something I would now call sacramental—a physical sign of a mystical holy grace.

In seminary and graduate school I learned how to appreciate higher criticism of this text, although that was certainly my most frightening learning experience. In those days it felt as if my faith were dangling over a cliff, clinging to a branch. But after letting go from sheer intellectual and spiritual exhaustion, I was amazed to discover I fell only inches from where I started.

The more I understand about the Bible’s dust-and-grit humanity, the more holy it becomes to me. Long after I’d left behind my father’s theory of the inerrancy of scripture, I found a Bible that had even more authority because it revealed how God inspired humans who stayed human when they wrote. Communities of faith, whose members have already committed every sin and faced every peril they could possibly experience, recorded in fallible ways the infallible truth of our redemption. That makes me love both God and ancient human words about God all the more.

I have long believed in the theories of oral traditions and the redaction editors of the Old Testament. The mysterious Mr. Q who was a source of the Synoptic Gospels is not that mysterious anymore. I realize that we have no idea who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, and I read most of the book of Joshua

**The older and more tattered
my Bible becomes, the more
it becomes part of me.**

by peeking through fingers over my eyes as I silently pray, “Really?” But if my house were on fire, this old Bible is still one of the first things I would grab before running out the door.

I cannot discard it on the shelf of previously read books for the same reason I dare not enjoy a glass of wine using the chalice that sits on our church’s communion table. It is what’s in the cup and what’s in the book that’s holy, I get that—but somehow the vessels of grace also become sanctified over time.

There have been many nights when I could not sleep and finally surrendered to the restlessness and went into my study. There I pulled out my tattered old Bible and read words like, “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?” (Ps. 56:8). Then I could finally go back to sleep.

On the dark nights there is a reason that I don’t go to my Kindle to read those words of spiritual comfort. Just holding the cherished, tattered old book reminds me of what I believe in—a great faith that has persevered even though it’s been tossed around with everything else.

M. Craig Barnes teaches at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

IN Review

Gospel journey

by J. Nelson Kraybill

Is it even legal for New Testament studies to be this much fun? Grab your walking stick and follow along as recent college graduate Norm paces among the ruins of the Citadel, the ancient palace of Herod the Great at the western edge of the Old City of Jerusalem. Norm has a Christian background, a bachelor's degree in religion, and a head full of questions.

The young man is in Israel/Palestine on a backpacking caper to discover *in situ* what a self-respecting intellectual adult can believe about Jesus. Aware that Herod's palace eventually became Governor Pontius Pilate's residence, our hero finds three ancient steps among the ruins—a stairway that some believe once led to Pilate's judgment hall. If this is true, Norm broods, he is "standing near where Jesus stood when his death sentence was announced."

This vignette comes from a book that is neither a novel nor a traditional introduction to the New Testament. With his imagination in overdrive, Bruce Fisk of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California, has created the fictional character Norm (Fisk's alter ego?) to guide readers through today's Holy Land and into the thicket of New Testament scholarship. Norm's trip is imaginary, but it reflects insights Fisk has garnered on his own frequent travels in Israel/Palestine. The happy result is a travelogue-textbook that gives a satisfying overview of recent historical Jesus scholarship and provides a colorful introduction to archaeological treasures of the Holy Land.

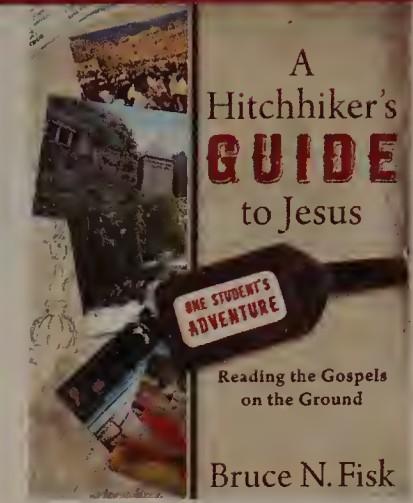
As Norm makes the rounds to standard footsteps-of-Jesus sites (Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, Gethsemane), he thumbs his Bible and recalls books or lectures on the New Testament that he

encountered in college. As new questions emerge, he exchanges emails with his erstwhile college mentor, Professor Guilder, who provides a composite of what a good college-level New Testament prof ought to be teaching.

Intrepid Norm still wants to be a Christian, and he has a good grasp of scripture. But the faith of his childhood is twisting in the wind. During his Holy Land sojourn, Norm meets people who respond to his questions. In a streak of luck, he meets or otherwise engages John Dominic Crossan, James Dunn, Bart Ehrman, N. T. Wright and other luminaries of New Testament scholarship.

Archaeologist Jonathan Reed just happens to be making a film at Capernaum when Norm arrives. "Wire-rimmed glasses couldn't hide the sparkle in his eyes," Norm writes. In response to a question from Norm, Reed declares that houses in ancient Capernaum "were made of unhewn fieldstones, mud, wooden beams, and thatched roofs." Similar historical and archaeological details fill Norm's journals, and Fisk has taken pains to ensure that they are accurate.

Precocious Norm puts questions to the entire pantheon of scholars he engages, creating a nonthreatening way for Fisk to address conundrums that many Bible readers struggle with: How much about Jesus in the Gospels is historically accurate? Can we trust the New Testament if its authors embellished their stories? Why did Jesus have to die? Can modern people believe in the resurrection? In assessing the reliability and authenticity of specific Gospel accounts, Norm judges by criteria familiar to critical scholars, including multiple attestation (if an account comes from more



Bruce N. Fisk

A Hitchhiker's Guide to Jesus: Reading the Gospels on the Ground

By Bruce N. Fisk

Baker Academic, 320 pp., \$22.99 paperback

than one source, it is probably reliable) and embarrassment (if something would be awkward for the early church to note, the account is probably authentic).

In addition to mining insights from modern scholarship, Norm repeatedly meets local people who illuminate his understanding of scripture. A Palestinian man at Jenin explains how olive presses work—helping Norm later make sense of an olive press at Gethsemane. As our hitchhiker wrestles with inconsistencies and improbabilities in the Gospels, he eventually concludes that the evangelists were not "courthouse lawyers" but "nimble musicians trading riffs on a well-loved classic."

Determined to make sense of scriptural authority, Norm finds his critical faith by embracing paradox and mystery. Lesslie Newbigin, Norm recalls, "contends that both fundamentalists and liberals have embraced the Enlightenment lie that we must hold out for certainty." Our traveler's close examination of how the Gospels treat Judas leads him to conclude that "we have caught the evangelists in the act of interpreting history through the lens of Scripture." That is, the authors of the four

J. Nelson Kraybill is lead pastor of Prairie Street Mennonite Church (Elkhart, Indiana), president emeritus of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and a pilgrimage leader to Bible lands with TourMagination.

Gospels made the players in the Jesus story fit the mold of well-known Old Testament stories and prophecies.

Along with his persistent quest for truth, Norm also has some good fun and experiences a few pratfalls. He smokes (tobacco, to be sure) from a hookah at a Palestinian refugee camp. Exhausted, he falls asleep inside a niche tomb in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and is awakened by startled tourists. Norm falls in love with the "Mona Lisa of Galilee," a famous third-century mosaic at Sepphoris. Unsure how long he slept with his face in a book at the library of the École Biblique in Jerusalem (which he frequents for scholarly resources), he observes that the "puddle of drool on the page wasn't pretty." Such whimsical reports occur throughout Norm's account, providing relief from the earnest pursuit of truth and justice.

Though he doesn't belabor issues related to the present Israel-Palestine conflict, Norm is disturbed by mistreatment of Palestinians by the Israel Defense Forces. Palestinians who collaborate with the IDF as informers are the modern equivalent of Judas, he concludes. Jewish settlers in the West Bank remind him of the smug and oppressive Jewish priestly class of Jesus' day. Recalling Jesus' commitment to non-violence, however, Norm is unimpressed by the glorification of martyrdom and terrorism that he sees among Palestinians in the West Bank.

Norm comes through his intense journey of doubt and inquiry with a kind of second naïveté, having "learned to trade away my tidy system for an unfinished, mystery-laden story." At the end of his

trek Norm concludes that the historical Jesus was innocent but not innocuous, subversive but not seditious, a rebel but not a revolutionary, good but not safe. In reading back over his journals, Norm observes a "growing resolve to linger with the questions"—and implicitly invites the reader to do the same. Regarding Jesus' resurrection, Norm decides that "The Man" still "lurks at society's margins and lingers in its marketplaces." Norm had seen the risen Christ in the reconciliation work of Elias Chacour at Ibillin and in the tender care a Christian volunteer named Anna gave to disabled children at Tabgha by the Sea of Galilee.

Fisk does not pretend to make a leading-edge contribution to biblical research with this book; he's done that elsewhere. *A Hitchhiker's Guide* is the work of an effective teacher with creative pedagogy. Fisk's narrative, accompanied by actual readings from the scholars Norm ostensibly meets, will provide college students and others wanting a basic introduction to the Gospels a winsome way to learn. Anyone visiting Israel/Palestine or seeking a quick overview of historical Jesus studies will also benefit from Norm's journals.

This semifictional approach to New Testament study is risky, but it works. Fisk is a careful academic who knows and mines his sources, and he presents a range of scholarly insights with respect and clarity. A decent bibliography in *A Hitchhiker's Guide* provides good leads for further study, and more than 200 endnotes buttress specific comments and events so the reader can confirm that Norm's pilgrimage is reliable.

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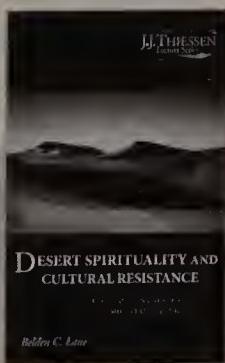
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Naked Spirituality: A Life with God in 12 Simple Words

By Brian D. McLaren

HarperOne, 288 pp., \$25.99

In *Naked Spirituality*, Brian McLaren both charts an arc of the spiritual life and suggests practices to nurture the spiritual life during its different stages. The book's architecture is a bit complicated. It presents four seasons of the spiritual life. Each season has one theme and three practices. Each practice has one key word associated with it, and often some alternate words as well. If you can bear with the dizzying scheme, you'll find that inside it are countless insights.

The first season of the spiritual life, springtime, is the season of simplicity. Think, here, of a person who has returned to church after many years; think of a new convert; think of someone who

has just discovered or rediscovered prayer. During this spiritual springtime, we find God in everything. In McLaren's formulation, "in Simplicity, we reach out to God in happiness. We see the world as it should be." Although there is a certain effortlessness to springtime, McLaren offers three practices that can help cultivate our gleeful attention to God in this season: invocation, or noticing that God is here; thanksgiving; and jubilant wonder at the abundance of God and God's creation.

Entering the summer of the spiritual life, the season of complexity, we move from blissful, God-drenched enthusiasm to an awareness of pain, failure and limitation—one's own limits and those of one's friends and the world. We respond to this recognition of limitation and pain by seeking forgiveness and seeking change. Specifically, the three practices McLaren offers are self-examination and confession (the words associated with this practice are *sorry, regret* and *mercy*),

petition (*help, guidance, strength, wisdom* and *patience*), and compassion and intercession (*please, mercy, bless, peace* and *grace*). As I read this section, I kept thinking about the etymology of *complexity*: its Latin root means "braid together," or "entwine." Confession, petition and intercession all have something to do with recognizing the extent to which we are entwined with others.

After complexity comes the autumnal season of perplexity. This is Job's season. Your prayers—if you can still pray—are not answered. The God you thought you knew is nowhere to be found. This is a season of angst, of disillusionment, of suffering, when "mention of God evokes feelings of ambivalence." The three practices of this season are desperate survival, rage and lament. One of the words associated with perplexity is *no*, the enunciation of refusal. McLaren deserves endless thanks for reminding us that estrangement and *no* do not represent a breakdown of the spiritual life.

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Rather, they are an organic part of the that life.

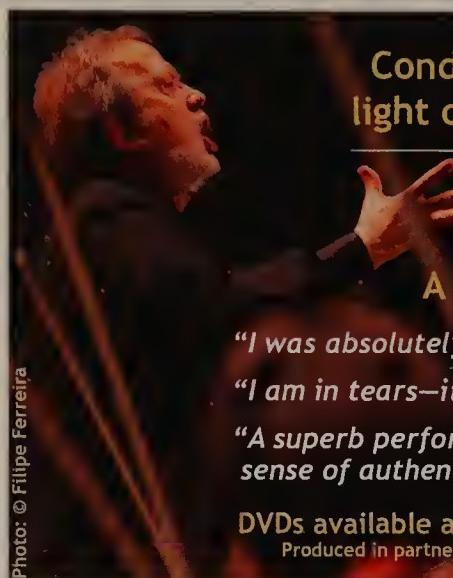
The season of perplexity may feel eternal, but it is not. After perplexity comes harmony. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur, McLaren says that during this season, we come into our “second naïveté.” There are echoes of our springtime enthusiasms, but here things are quieter, more still. Revealingly, the season McLaren associates with harmony is winter—not a threatening, hypothermal winter, but a winter of “naked trees. Frozen ponds. Hibernation. Starkness. Long, dark, silent nights, and cold days blanketed in snow.... Winter’s rest. That chattering, hypervigilant consciousness . . . now goes silent. It takes a breath.” In this season, “the world is bathed in a gentle luminosity of compassion,” and we are able to see more acutely. We see our friends and neighbors, and indeed ourselves, as children of God “needing love.” And we see God more clearly, too: we begin to separate God from “our God concepts,” and when we speak of God, or to God,

around us, noticing that God is here, wherever it is that we are. McLaren associates invocation with the word *here*, and he notes that throughout the Bible people’s relationships with God turn on this here-ness: people noticing God is often marked either by God asking, “Is anybody here?” or by an individual saying to God, “Here I am.”

In his discussion of invocation,

McLaren is calling us to pay attention—and he is right to give attentiveness pride of place as the first of his 12 practices, for it underpins the other 11.

In complexity, we pay attention to limitation, and we pay attention to ways we are braided together with our neighbors. In perplexity, we pay attention to God’s elusiveness. And in harmony, perhaps, we simply attend.



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our pronouns falter, because God is more than we understand when we say “he” “she,” “it,” or even “you.” Our nouns stumble.... Even our most paradoxical and mysterious nouns break open—like “Trinity,” “the Divine,” “the Sacred One,” or “the Holy One”—because even they can’t fully contain or define the mystery to which they point.

This is a season of “deepening,” and it is characterized by the practices of beholding (the mantras include *ah*, *maybe* and *amen*); of saying yes, or of “deepening by joining” ourselves to God, to other people and to projects of transformation; and of contemplative resting. If complexity is Job’s time, perhaps the patron saint of harmony is James Joyce’s Molly Bloom: “Yes I said yes I will Yes.”

Naked Spirituality is very astute. I will return most frequently to McLaren’s chapters on invocation. This first spiritual practice is about noticing—noticing where we are, noticing what is right



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Reviewed by Lauren F. Winner, assistant professor of Christian spirituality at Duke Divinity School.

Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life

By William A. Dyrness

Eerdmans, 352 pp., \$26.00 paperback

In *Poetic Theology*, William Dyrness tries to keep one eye on the historical conversation about art's theological value, one eye on the issues of the contemporary church, and one eye on the interests of art itself. As the metaphor implies, this project could make anyone dizzy. But disorientation, "making strange," is central to the artfulness of poetry, and it is this artfulness that Dyrness wants to restore to Protestant Christian practice. "This book seeks to connect poetry and theology. It probably ought to have been written in poetry," his preface begins.

Indeed, perhaps only a poem could achieve the synthesis of theology and lived experience to which Dyrness is admirably drawn. This book bears little resemblance to a poem. *Poetic Theology*

teaches and recapitulates, at times masterfully, but does not reorient or discomfit in the way good art does. In its own shape and style, Dyrness's book demonstrates the gulf between poetry and theology in our current discourse.

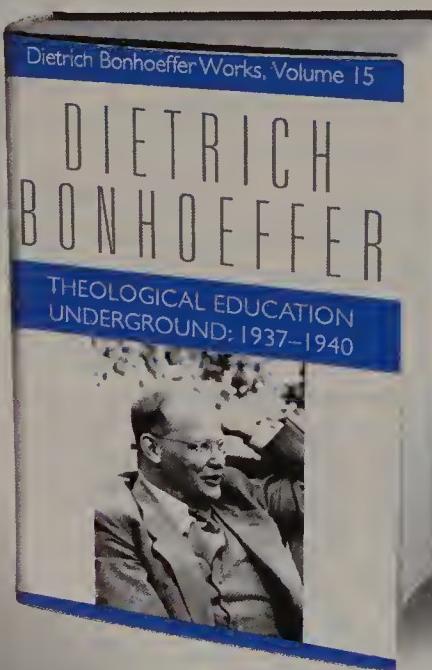
Eager to accommodate upper-middle-class American life, Dyrness takes as his starting point the secular passions of young people. He wants a theology that has room for "creative activities of many kinds," including watching college football, skiing, visiting art galleries, even playing video games. This apologetic approach allows Dyrness to frame theological questions in ways that directly apply to the local church: Where do the "passionate commitments" of contemporary secular people to "build, move, create" come from? As Christians, how do we fit these extra-ecclesial, nonreligious passions into the gospel's call? And, most importantly for Dyrness, how should the church change to reflect—and attract—a society driven by these concerns and expectations?

Seeking answers to these questions, *Poetic Theology* starts with a 200-page tour through Christian aesthetic thought. Major stops include Augustine, the medievals (Dante and Pico), the Pietists (Schiller, Kant), artistic Calvinists (Edwards and Kuyper) and contemporary figures like Hans Urs von Balthasar and Graham Ward. There are good explanations of art in every Christian age, and as Dyrness shows, both romantic and modernist artists are indebted to Christianity for their sense of poetry's powers. Throughout this survey, Dyrness's sympathies lie with the thinkers who defend human desire and praise our ability to relate to God through our senses. Dyrness rightly insists, however, that we must ground human desire and imagination in scripture and in God's own trinitarian relationship. Art can indeed give praise to God, but it matters how and why we praise.

The sixth and seventh chapters, in which Dyrness specifically explores his own Reformed Protestantism's uneasy relationship to art, are the best part of the book. Through a reading of John Bunyan, the Puritans and Dutch painting, Dyrness comes close to formulating a theological poetics. Rather than presuming that one can arrive at a complete knowledge of God in human life, Reformed theology shapes itself according to the story of our salvation through Jesus Christ. It is this drama of estrangement and redemption, and not God Godself, that art can animate. In contrast to Dante's *Comedy*, where life is a journey toward an unmediated vision of the divine, a Protestant poetics is indirect, auditory, dialectical, quotidian. Or to cite Emily Dickinson: "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant."

Knowledgeable and proud of this slanted approach, Dyrness demonstrates Reformed Protestantism's capacity to inspire lasting art. But he also has a bone to pick with his tradition, particularly the way many Protestants have been led to regard aesthetic experience with suspicion or ignorance. What Calvin said about images, music, dancing and cere-

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Reviewed by Nate Klug, a student at Yale Divinity School, who has new poems coming out in Poetry and Threepenny Review.

monies in 16th-century Switzerland only goes so far. Furthermore, as Dyrness shows, the general intention and temperament of Calvin's *Institutes* actually encourages us to explore faith's aesthetic aspect.

Responding to the larger secular culture, with its wedding industry and Yelp reviews and MFA programs, *Poetic Theology* presents a church that is open to the different ways the Spirit can work. The book's most controversial and courageous moment is when Dyrness insists that any theology of justice is incomplete without aesthetic elucidation. As in both Isaiah and Revelation, social transformation originates in the imagination. Beauty is no afterthought to God. Dyrness's striking proposal that "we need a fresh vision of God apart from and before we work for justice" should resonate prophetically with liberal and conservative Christians alike.

Dyrness concludes by calling Protestant churches back to a greater appreciation of style and form in worship. His intimacy with Reformed thought allows him to present his own reforming project in faithful and appealing terms: "Calvin sought to purify the heart precisely by removing distracting images. But in so doing, he inadvertently discouraged the shaping of objects that stimulate the imagination and fire the heart, thus diminishing the very inner life he meant to celebrate." We must start trusting our eyes and our feelings again in order to more fully trust God.

So what does this creative trust look like? Dante clearly shapes Dyrness's high opinion of human creativity in all its strangeness. But what about modernists like Wallace Stevens, whose "Sunday Morning" anticipates Dyrness's assessment of our aesthetically evaluative culture by almost a hundred years. And what about contemporary poets who are still specifically engaged with Reformed thought, like Donald Revell and Pam Rehm?

In Dyrness's call for a constructive Protestant poetic theology, one misses the presence of actual poetry. Although its survey of Christian aesthetics is rich, *Poetic Theology* may end up reaffirming the very divide between art and church that it laments.

The Submission: A Novel
By Amy Waldman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 320 pp., \$26.00

Amy Waldman's debut novel asks us to take a long look at ourselves and be disappointed. Or to look at the aftermath of 9/11 and ask, "Could we have handled that any worse?"

The novel opens with a vote to select a design for the 9/11 memorial. The contestants' names had been detached from their submissions, and now the winner's name is revealed: Mohammad Khan. "There were a few gasps," Waldman writes, "and 'hmmms,' an 'interesting,' an 'oh my.' Then: 'Jesus fucking Christ! It's a goddamn Muslim!'" as Khan's submission form is passed around the table.

Some members of the jury responsible for choosing the design—made up of city bigwigs, architectural critics, and a representative of the victims' families—immediately suggest abandoning Khan's

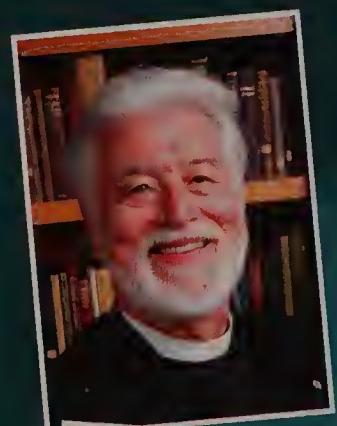
design and going with their second choice. Others think they should stick with Khan. But is he "suitable"? Is he "really American"? Would choosing his design be "a healing gesture" or merely "multicultural pandering"? Would it be offensive to the victims' families? Should the families be more "tolerant"?

The jury decides to reconvene a few days later to decide the issue, and in the meantime someone leaks the name of the controversial winner to the press, kicking off a vituperative backlash and frenzied damage control that will snowball until the novel's conclusion. Every news outlet is consumed by the debate. The jury members, many of whom feel ambivalent about endorsing Khan, are forced to be spokespeople. Anti-Islamic groups stage protests. The victims' families organize rallies. Islamic lobbyists fight for the right of a Muslim to design a public monument.

Reviewed by Janet Potter, *CENTURY* editorial assistant.

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The story is told from the point of view of various participants in the conflict—including jury members, a 9/11 widow, a New York reporter and Khan himself. Khan was born and raised in the United States and does not practice Islam. Before the design contest, he didn't identify very strongly as a Muslim. It is the resulting controversy that forces him to be a symbol for civil rights in a no-win situation. "If Khan fights for his rights, he's an aggressive, angry Muslim waging stealth jihad. If he gives in, he's conceding they weren't his rights to begin with."

Khan spends most of the book somewhere in the middle—refusing to withdraw from the competition, refusing to make a statement condemning fundamentalists, but also refusing to be used as a poster child for religious tolerance. He seems to be hoping that everyone will recognize that they're overreacting and will decide to build his monument because of its artistic merit.

It would seem that Khan should

expect support from the jury that chose his design, but the jury's head, Paul, and its token 9/11 widow, Claire—both highly educated, self-described liberal New Yorkers—are constantly finding reasons not to fight for it. Paul has to think about raising the funds to build the monument and about how difficult that might be with a Muslim architect. Claire has to represent the families, and many of them are vehemently opposed to Khan. Along with the mayor and governor, Paul and Claire condemn racism against Muslims, but they continue to leave room for it. Everyone is enacting or enabling someone else's racism. Many assume that Khan's opponents can be neither reasoned with nor overpowered, so they don't try to do so. "Did Muslims ruin whatever they touched?" Paul asks himself at one point. "The question, so unfair, startled him, as if someone else had asked it."

The novel is thus examining the parameters of racism. Are you a racist only if you actively dislike and try to

oppress a group of people? Or is the exasperated inaction of Paul and Claire a kind of secondary racism?

Though it takes on a hot-button issue, *The Submission* is not an emotional book. The one chord of emotion that sounds through the entire narrative is dread—the dread that comes from watching a story unfold and knowing that it will continue to get more depressing with each turn of the page. The characters' constant ideological sidestepping feels numbingly unstoppable. It's the same feeling I get if I'm forced to watch more than ten minutes of the news, in which all the world's worst qualities are digested and presented to me in rapid succession.

As a former *New York Times* bureau co-chief, Waldman is accustomed to this barrage, which she calls "the endless blare of news—a car alarm that wouldn't turn off." Her dishearteningly plausible descriptions of the media frenzy surrounding Khan's selection are punctuated only by long, circular conversations between the characters. They meet, they discuss the impossible situation, and they become more convinced that the right answer doesn't exist. By the end of the novel, several of the characters who started out as fair-minded and optimistic have become bitter and partisan. It's not a winsome argument for the value of public discourse.

Khan, defending his decision not to withdraw his submission, says, "Sometimes America has to be pushed—it has to be reminded of what it is." That may be Waldman's hope for *The Submission*, but the novel reminds us less of our lofty goals than of the deep, embedded troubles that prevent us from reaching them.

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ON Film

50/50

Directed by Jonathan Levine
Starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt,
Seth Rogen and Anna Kendrick

5 0/50 is a delicate balancing act: a comedy-drama about a 27-year-old man named Adam (the amazing Joseph Gordon-Levitt) who learns he has a malignant spinal tumor and a 50 percent chance of surviving it. The lovely surprise is that writer Will Reiser and director Jonathan Levine pull off twin feats: they sustain a tone pitched midway between ironic and poignant, and they touch the audience without pushing pathos at us.

The movie aims to steer clear of the first-you-laugh-and-then-you-cry agenda of *Terms of Endearment*, in which Debra Winger plays the young woman whose cancer foregrounds her dysfunctional relationship with her difficult mother (Shirley MacLaine). The idea is instead to present the cancer and chemotherapy as "Adam's Adventures in Wonderland." Everything he experiences is brand new and bizarre, and he has to figure out how to thread his way through this obstacle course of the unexpected.

There's the party that his co-worker and best pal Kyle (Seth Rogen) insists on throwing for him, at which friends and colleagues embarrass Adam with sentimentality and make it painfully clear that they assume they're saying goodbye to him. There's the chemo regimen, which throws him into a camaraderie with two older patients (Philip Baker Hall and Matt Frewer) who are on the same schedule. Adam discovers the pleasures of marijuana for the first time, which negotiates the effects of the chemo while keeping him cozy and remote in his newly found corner of the world.

Both his girlfriend (Bryce Dallas Howard) and his mother (Anjelica Huston) turn his illness into melodrama in which they're the stars. And Adam



BALANCING ACT: Cancer upends life for Adam (Joseph Gordon-Levitt, left) and his friend Kyle (Seth Rogen, right).

lands in the office of a novice therapist named Katherine (Anna Kendrick) who's even younger than he is and who scrambles to figure out how to help him.

The movie is sure-footed enough to get away with introducing a romantic-comedy element. Adam and Katherine are an unconventional twist on the rom-com premise that the couple begins in an adversarial relationship that they eventually transcend. Here they're in a situation that imposes limitations on their interaction, but they tug gently at the blurry line that separates them. She is determined to guide him through his ordeal, despite the acknowledged inadequacy of the tools at her disposal and his increasingly angry challenges to her arsenal of professional responses. This struggle stands in for the tests thrown at a conventional romantic-comedy couple to prove they deserve each other.

Kendrick manages the trick of being completely grounded while keeping her performer's footprint light. And Gordon-Levitt creates a character whose emotional spectrum is so distinctly circumscribed by the demands of the script that he doesn't seem like any of the other distraught young heroes of recent American movies or like any of the other characters he's played.

The filmmakers slip up only once: about to undergo surgery, Adam is given a Lifetime Movie moment. Otherwise this offbeat and character-driven picture is reminiscent of the small movies that dropped into movie houses regularly in the early 1970s.

Footloose

Directed by Craig Brewer
Starring Kenny Wormald, Julianne Hough
and Dennis Quaid

Craig Brewer, the extraordinary young director of *Hustle & Flow* and *Black Snake Moan*, brings his sharp ear for southern culture's tone and rhythms to this remake of a 1998 pop musical (itself a remake of a 1984 film) set in a small Georgia town. The problem is that the material is still *Footloose*.

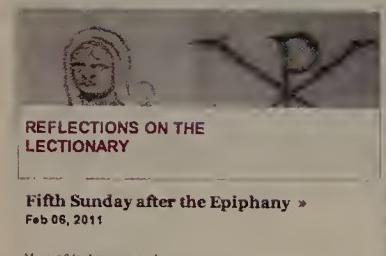
Kenny Wormald plays the Boston kid who goes to live with his uncle and aunt and challenges the town ordinance against dancing. In this version, the prohibition was instituted after five teenagers were killed in a car crash following a dance. That story suggests the rule was an authentic response to the grief of the community. What doesn't make sense is the town elders' claim that dancing is lewd and lascivious. It's as if they are in a rock-'n'-roll musical from the Elvis Presley era.

Brewer may be trying to mute the modern-day setting: none of the teenagers seems to own a computer or a cell phone, which makes their contemporary slang sound weirdly dissociated.

Wormald can dance, but he's a dud as an actor. Luckily he shares most of his scenes with the phenomenal young actor Miles Teller, who plays a grinning juvenile version of a good ol' boy who befriends the hero and, in the movie's best number, "Let's Hear It for the Boy," learns how to dance.

Reviewed by Steve Vineberg, who teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.

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BLOGGING TOWARD SUNDAY
Coming in weakness »
1 Corinthians 2:1-18
Jan 31, 2011 by Scott D. Anderson
For the past 20 years I have toiled in the vineyards of two state legislatures: in California for 12 years and now in Wisconsin for the past eight, along with occasional forays to the U.S. Congress. In these arenas I have represented the interests of state councils of churches, which are really the interests of those who don't have the time, money or wherewithal to advocate for themselves: children, impoverished families, working-class parents with low-paying jobs.

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(Continued from page 6)

message is not unified because in the plurality of America the message is not unified. The music behind the multiple messages for me is don't forget the "we"—honor the "we" in "we the people." Let's hope that we may be moving beyond the dominant "I" of America's Enlightenment-driven culture to an era of "we the people," all carrying signs with different messages and conferring with each other on how to move forward.

*Paul Steinke
New York, N.Y.*

Gary Dorrien's plan ("The case against Wall Street," Nov. 15) seems to be an elitist top-down one to have the government give people incentive to act more collectively. He advocates the creation of more cooperatives so that people have more choice, but there is nothing currently prohibiting such creation and such choice. I certainly agree with Dorrien that democracy is a messy process; one consequence of this reality is that there's nothing that will force people to choose what we enlightened ones see to be in their best self-interest.

He does fault Wall Street, and rightly

so, but only partially. A more accurate reading would fault crony capitalism in which Wall Street and Washington collude, and in which regulators and those they purport to regulate regularly collude. The government had all the tools it needed in its regulatory toolbox before the various elements of the crisis emerged.

*Peter Keese
Knoxville, Tenn.*

Dying badly . . .

As a retired hospice chaplain who also served 35 years as a church pastor, I appreciate Allen Verhey's insights and challenges to the Christian community ("Still dying badly," Nov. 1), but I feel he lacks an appreciation of the hospice chaplain's ministry. When the patient has no religious community to provide support, the chaplain is able to explore the "generic spirituality" expressed by patients and assist them in their search for peace.

When I heard patients confess that their beliefs were not very comforting and did not provide them peace or hope as they faced the end of life, I was able to respond to their seeking spirit. The chaplain's presence on the hospice team supports both the religious communities

identified by the patients as well as patients who are not associated with a religious community.

Many pastors fail miserably when they enter the world of one who is dying. They ask questions that they already know the answers to instead of open-ended questions like, "What troubles you the most?" or "When you're here alone what do you think about most?" In this regard, I couldn't agree more with the article that the churches need to be training their members in the art of dying well.

*William H. Griffith
Columbus, Ind.*

Verhey mentions that a "generic spirituality" has replaced the Christian faith in hospice. I was a hospice chaplain for 14 years. Whenever I was asked by a patient or family to visit them, I would first find out what was important to them spiritually. If they were connected to a church, I would offer to contact the pastor or priest. Most of the time they wanted me to continue my own visits. Since I had a wide church background I could often identify with what was important to them. My job was not to have them accept my faith but to encourage them in theirs.

*Clara S. Thompson
Montgomery, Ill.*

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by Rodney Clapp

CONSERVATIVE commentator Pat Buchanan has given up on America. In his new book, *Suicide of a Superpower*, he writes: "Our nation is disintegrating, ethnically, culturally, morally, politically. . . . we seem to detest each other in ways as deep as Southerners detested a mercantile North and Northerners detested an agrarian slaveholding South."

To be fair, Buchanan's book bears the subtitle *Will America Survive to 2025?* and Buchanan allows there is just enough time to snatch victory from defeat—if his prescriptions are

nurture us—giving us a language to speak and stories to tell and songs to sing. And just as we don't choose our parents, neither do we choose our country of origin.

"We are part of a country for better or worse," wrote the American essayist Randolph Bourne. "We have arrived in it through the operation of physiological laws, and not in any way through our own choice. By the time we have reached what are called years of discretion, its influences

er step: in loving our parents, we do not deny others the right to love their parents. Orwell remarks that patriotism is "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, one which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people."

For me, my parents are the best in the world. But I am not aggressive or exclusive in this claim—in fact, I expect you to make the same claim for your parents. I have "no

ot may take issue with his or her country's conduct without ceasing to be a patriot. In fact, we would say that an adult child who stood by passively and let his parents undertake a destructive course of action was not as loving as the adult child who intervened and resisted parental self-destruction.

Like love for parents, patriotism is "essentially noncompetitive" (says Bourne) and does not seek "competitive prestige" (says Orwell) in that it allows citizens of other countries to be loyal patriots to their own homes. It does not live or die by a series of loyalty tests that endorses its current government's latest actions. Patriotism is inwardly focused on one's own country, and so it is, in Bourne's words, "intensive and nonbelligerent."

As such, and perhaps surprisingly, true patriotism does not find its essence in war. War, with its terrible demands to kill and die, can exact sacrifices that test the mettle of a citizen's patriotism and maturity. But in its all-consuming nature it can also tempt the patriot to revert to a childlike state, become totally dependent on the state/father, and regress to a savage primal unity shriven of all responsibility and discernment. Thus, a true and properly circumspect patriotism is born of blood but not of bloodshed.

We love our parents and our homeland, even though we didn't choose them.

followed right now. But it remains clear that Buchanan is deeply alienated from much that actually is America today.

I can understand such alienation. For reasons very different from Buchanan's, I was sorely tempted toward alienation during the George W. Bush years. But I recognized alienation as a temptation to be fought.

In fact, we owe our country of origin patriotism. But not just any kind of patriotism. The term *patriot* drives from the Latin word for father, *pater*. The proper patriot realizes and expresses gratitude to her fatherland. Just as our biological mothers and fathers gift us with life and nuture, so too does the country of our origin gift and

have molded our habits, our values, our ways of thinking, so that however aware we may become, we never really lose the stamp of our civilization, or could become the child of another country."

Similarly, George Orwell wrote, "Good or evil, [your country] is yours, you belong to it, and this side of the grave you will never get away from the marks it has given you."

Notice the logic of patriotism. It is very much like the love for parents. We don't choose our parents, but they have marked us and we owe them love and gratitude. We love not just parents in general, but particularly our own parents, and so too do we love a specific country.

Take the similarity anoth-

wish to force upon other people" the conviction that my mother is the greatest of all mothers. The very nature of love for parents not only allows but demands that we each embrace our particular parents above all others—and so, too, with our country. We love our particular homeland, but nonexclusively and noncoercively, leaving others free to embrace their own, different homelands.

For good or ill, we love our parents. You can disapprove of your father's philandering and yet retain him as your beloved father. You can regret your mother's alcoholism and still claim her wholeheartedly as your mother. So too, the patri-

Rodney Clapp's Soundings column appears in every other issue.



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